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ABSTRACT

BRINGING HOME OUR ADVENTIST PRODIGALS:
A STRATEGIC PLAN TO RECLAIM YOUTH
IN THE TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

by

Paul David Tompkins

Adviser: A. Barry Gane

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: BRINGING HOME OUR ADVENTIST PRODIGALS: A STRATEGIC PLAN
TO RECLAIM YOUTH IN THE TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

Name of researcher: Paul David Tompkins

Name and degree of faculty adviser: A. Barry Gane, Ph.D.

Date completed: February 2009

Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist church is losing far too many of its young people. This trend is hurting the world-wide church, the local congregation, and individual families. Yet very little is being done about it!

The purpose of this study is to address this issue and to specifically formulate a Strategic Plan for reclaiming inactive youth in the Trans-European Division (TED).

Method

The TED territory is extensive, covering over thirty-five countries, therefore, a local pilot project was conducted. This involved identifying young people who the local

church listed as inactive, or non-attending, and then contacting them with a questionnaire as a research tool. In the case of minors, consent was sought from parents or guardians.

Two separate instruments were utilized, the first used as a discussion tool with focus groups of concerned parents, and the second as a questionnaire to hear from young people themselves.

Although the interviews were conducted in one country the underlying trends are extrapolated for use at a local church level in all countries throughout the TED.

Results

The young people interviewed have left for many reasons but the main identified issue was that they saw the church as being critical and uncaring. The peak age for becoming inactive was between 15-20 years of age. All who left still had a connection to the church through family and friends. All still saw themselves as Christian and fifty percent of the sample group felt that they would like to return one day. This gave cause for hope and was an important factor in creating a Strategic Plan for reclamation in the Trans-European Division.

Conclusions

The need for establishing youth friendly Churches of Refuge (COfRe) was identified. Such churches would be intentional in both retaining and reclaiming youth. Family-based youth ministry as a partnership model would be a key concept of such churches. This resulted in a Strategic Plan with criteria and action steps that could be contextualized for use in any local church setting.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

BRINGING HOME OUR ADVENTIST PRODIGALS:
A STRATEGIC PLAN TO RECLAIM YOUTH
IN THE TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Paul David Tompkins

February 2009

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A STRATEGIC PLAN TO RECLAIM YOUTH
IN THE TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

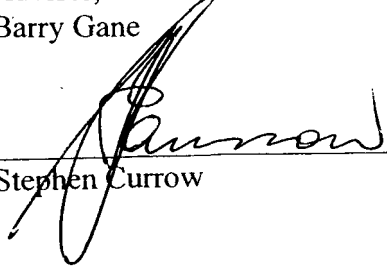
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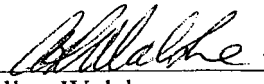
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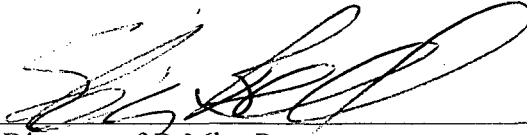
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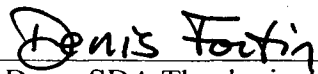
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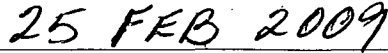

Adviser,
Barry Gane


Stephen Currow


Allan Walshe


Director of D.Min. Program
Skip Bell


Dean, SDA Theological Seminary
J. H. Denis Fortin


Date approved

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all those who took the time to respond to the questionnaire and thereby made the study both real and purposeful. Your thoughtful comments have given a valuable window into 21st century youth culture and your honest reflections also give great hope for the future.

I would also like to gratefully thank my wife, Dawn, for being the constant rock at home and for willingly accepting the many absences that have gone alongside a lifetime of youth ministry. Without your support I could not have followed my dream. Also thanks to my daughters, Laura and Amy, for keeping me relevant and for bringing a continuing sparkle in my life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
CORe	Church of Refuge
GN	<i>Good News Bible</i>
GC	General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
NAD	North American Division
NIV	<i>New International Version Bible</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version Bible</i>
RH	<i>Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Advent Review, Second Advent Review, Adventist Herald, Adventist Review</i>
SPD	South Pacific Division
TED	Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists
VG	Valuegenesis Youth Survey, Valuegenesis NAD, SPD, and Europe

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The loss of young people through the back door is a real issue for the church today. It is imperative that we take steps to make sure that as many as possible of those growing up in the church will remain to become active members. I also believe there is an overwhelming need to reach out to those who may, for whatever reason, have already become inactive over the years and reclaim them for Christ and the church.

It is not a lack of information that is the barrier to doing this. Never has a generation of youth been so closely studied. The Seventh-day Adventist *Valuegenesis* surveys of the 1990s and 2000, plus a subsequent European study in 2007 have provided much data. This subject affects all Christian denominations. In England, Marc Europe conducted an interdenominational study, *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*,¹ and the Anglican Church has published a book based on the English Church Attendance Survey (1998) entitled *The Tide is Running Out*.²

Studies undoubtedly agree that the church is losing a very significant proportion of its young people. Roger Dudley concluded that up to 50 percent of those Seventh-day

¹Peter Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Christian Research, 1993).

²Peter Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out* (London: Christian Research, 2000).

Adventist youth he studied, in a ten year longitudinal survey, had either become inactive or dropped out by the conclusion of the study.³ This trend is hurting families, congregations, and the church as a whole but very little seems to be done about it.

On a personal level I too have felt the hurt of seeing family members leave the faith that they were nurtured in. As a pastor and youth director I have observed many young people who grew up in the church fall away from regular attendance. The strange fact that I have observed is that the church often seems to continue almost as if nothing has happened. This, however, seems to be changing, and the General Conference has recently flagged this up as one of the major issues facing the church and issued an appeal for this to be studied at all levels.⁴

Statement of the Task

The main goals of the project are to firstly examine the reasons why so many youth are either becoming inactive or leaving the church. Secondly, to formulate a plan designed to make churches a safe haven for our youth and to put in place mechanisms that will help reclaim, over time, as many of these inactive youth as possible. As such it must be stated from the outset that there are elements of both retention and reclamation that will be featured throughout this study.

The study will take note of a number of existing survey findings throughout the world but will essentially be undertaken from a European perspective. The recent

³Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).

⁴Since the 2005 General Conference Session each World Division has been asked to study the retention of members. This relates to baptized members of all ages.

European Valuegenesis Survey will be referenced alongside a more in-depth analysis of a local pilot study, featuring interviews with inactive youth from a church in Hertfordshire, England. A local pilot project is important as any attempt to reclaim youth will by necessity happen at the grass roots setting. The overall findings will also be evaluated to act as a guide for a Strategic Plan that is highlighted in the project title, *Bringing Home Our Adventist Prodigals: A Strategic Plan to Reclaim Youth in the Trans-European Division*.⁵

Justification for the Dissertation

In Matt 18 Jesus interrupts His discourse on who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven by placing a child in their midst and warning anyone who causes a child to stumble that they would be better off to never have existed. He then tells the parable of the Lost Sheep where He shows that the shepherd will leave the ninety nine that are safe to find just one that is missing. He specifically states, “In the same way your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matt 18:14).

In Luke 15 Jesus also tells the parables of the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. The latter (Lost or Prodigal Son) shows the father running to meet his returning son and welcoming him back with open arms. The biblical references are important as a basis to establish a new paradigm for a reclamation ministry.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church last looked at restructuring Youth Ministry in the 1990s. Following a Commission on Youth the Autumn Council of 1992 voted a six

⁵The Trans-European Division consists of thirteen Unions in the territories of the Adriatic, Baltic, Britain, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Middle East, Netherlands, Norway Pakistan, Poland, South East European, and Sweden. Also three Attached Fields in Greece, Iceland, and Israel.

point plan. This included revival, recovery, evangelism, and nurture. It also authorized the formation of a Strategic Plan to restructure and rebuild youth ministry.

To-date there has not been a Strategic Plan for Recovery specifically developed, adopted, or implemented in the Trans-European Division where I currently serve as Youth Director. One outcome of this project is to develop a plan and training program for the division.

Methodology and Description of the Dissertation Process

Current literature will be reviewed including surveys in Europe, America, and Australia. Books and articles written from these surveys will be closely studied. Focus groups will be consulted to ascertain the best perceived approaches to the problem and a survey instrument will be prepared for use on a local level. Using the survey instrument as a tool, data will be analyzed from interviews and survey returns from at least twenty inactive youth in England. The purpose is to gain first hand information which will form a central part of the analysis of the current situation.

The issue of reclamation and retention will be presented to the first youth Advisory of the Trans-European Division, of the new quinquennium⁶ in 2007. Following feedback and discussion a draft Strategic Plan will be drawn up with the agreement of the Union Youth Directors. Following this dialogue process the Strategic Plan would be presented to the 2008 TED Spring Meetings for acceptance and phased introduction throughout the Division territory.

⁶The current five year quinquennium, between GC sessions, is from 2005-2010.

Expectations for the Dissertation

This project will provide a resource base for a ministry to inactive youth in the Trans-European Division. The Strategic Plan will be prepared in conjunction with the youth directors of each Union. It will also be presented to the Division Executive Committee and be incorporated into a division-wide training Institute of Youth Evangelism. As such it will help provide strategies for Union Youth directors to specifically address the problem of inactive youth in their countries. Additionally, the project can be used to educate and train church members, in all areas, to become more actively involved in this ministry.

Delimitations

The project is designed to aid youth ministry in the Trans-European Division (TED) which I serve. As highlighted in an earlier footnote this is a major territorial block and by definition allows for some recognized limitations to the study.

The personal survey was conducted around one church district and thereby in only one country out of the sixteen Unions and Attached fields that make up the TED constituency. It was, however, quite deliberately conducted as a pilot study recognizing that the principles involved are relevant, when contextualized, to other fields.

The questionnaires for focus groups, the youth survey, and the methodology will need to be translated and adapted within the cultural parameters of each national setting. Although the immediate personal research is limited to a local level it is relevant to a wider field as all contact with inactive youth in any area will by definition take place at a local level.

A further limitation is the age range of the respondents. From the sample that

ultimately responded 54 percent were in the 14-25 age target group and 46 percent were in a higher age bracket, reaching into their thirties and forties. It is recognized that the experience and thought patterns of these groups may well be different. The common feature, however, is that they were recorded by the local church(s) as being inactive at the time of the survey.

Following the research a series of meetings with the Division youth directors helped to create a Strategic Plan for the division concentrating on how churches in all areas can create a safe haven for youth. It is likewise recognized that the Strategic Plan and subsequent Institute of Youth Evangelism will similarly need to be adapted and evaluated locally in relationship to context and cultural relevance. This includes the ever changing nature of youth culture. It will therefore be seen as a dynamic document to be updated as and when relevant changes take place.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter two will present a theological basis for reaching out to the lost. The Scriptures are far from silent on this issue and offer a compelling rationale for a reclamation ministry.

Chapter three will present a search of current literature available on the subject. A personal experience of the issue will initially be presented, from the early days of my ministry.⁷ European sources will be particularly mentioned together with other literature and an overview of current church programs.

⁷I commenced ministry in 1981 as an intern in the South England Conference and worked in local churches until 1985. From 1985 until the present date I have served the church as Youth Director in the South England Conference, British Union, and presently in the Trans-European Division (2000-to-date).

In chapter four the findings from both the Focus Groups and the sample questionnaires will be analyzed. The process of gaining this information will also be examined as a base for further future reclamation pilot projects. Contacting inactive members is not easy and also represents a long term commitment to building relationships. This will be examined as part of the preparation for the Strategic Plan.

Chapter five deals with the fundamental question of what must the church do about the loss of young people through the back door? This includes focusing on the need for youth friendly churches based on the concept of refuge. Here the twin thrust of retention and reclamation will be evident. A family-based youth model is introduced with a systems approach to the needs of teenagers and their families. The chapter concludes with a summary of a Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan for the Trans-European Division.

In chapter six the first stage of implementing and evaluating this plan is considered. Three recommendations from the TED Spring Meeting are noted with reference to the ongoing process for further development of a plan of action and the introduction of a division-wide training program. The first session of the Institute of Youth Evangelism, having been field tested, is opened up for further review utilizing responses from participant evaluation forms. An evaluation of the need for change in the application of youth ministry is also developed.

Finally in chapter seven the project is summarized and some conclusions offered in relation to the very distinct reality of youth returning to church. Seven recommendations are presented as a result of the field research and the subsequent Strategic Plan.

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR SEEKING THE LOST

Introduction

The Bible provides a compelling insight into our world between two focal points: Paradise lost (Genesis) and Paradise regained (Revelation). In between these two points the record is given of God reaching out to humankind and providing a plan of salvation. It is very evident that by no means does all run smoothly. The biblical account does not hide the record of the wandering of God's people through the ages.

Today we are still part of that story. Paradise regained has not yet been reached. As such it is of prime importance to note the emphasis that is placed throughout Scripture on reaching out and seeking to reclaim those that had wandered away. This includes the key features of God actively seeking to reclaim the lost and also His commission to His followers to be ambassadors, ministers for reconciliation.

Israel Regathered

In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah the prophet speaks of a time when the Messiah will bring the outcasts home (Isa 11:11, 12). This is an important theme and "the passage is united by the single theme of YHWH's gathering the scattered exiles of his people."¹

¹"YHWH's Second Deliverance (11:11-16): Form/Structure/Setting," *The Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. J. D. W. Watts (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 24:215.

On that day they will be gathered from the four corners of the earth.

The re-gathering of his people, or bringing home the outcasts, clearly shows that God's people had become lost and needed finding. Bringing home outcasts represents a recovery, or reclamation of the lost, and this theme is a repeated focus throughout the biblical record in both the Old and New Testaments.

With reference to the eleventh chapter of Isaiah Scott Larson and Larry Brendro highlight the point of reclamation being a major theme in Scripture. In their book *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters*, they note: "The word *reclaim* appears only once in the Bible, though it is a major theme of the scriptures" (emphasis mine).² While the New International Version supports this translation others see the Hebrew word *qanah* referring to recover or redeem.³ It is this recurring theme of recovering the lost, rather than a focus on a specific word, which we will pursue in this chapter.

Probably the most well-known example of gathering and re-gathering is given in the form of the pastoral analogy of a shepherd caring for his sheep, which will be examined next.

The Shepherd and the Sheep

The Shepherd's Responsibility

The biblical analogy of the shepherd caring for his sheep is well known from the New Testament but also has its origin in the Old Testament times. In Ezek 34 the word of the Lord comes directly to the leaders (shepherds) of Israel. They are admonished to

²Scott Larson and Larry Brendtro, *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters* (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 2000), 19.

³*The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1996), s.v. "Qanah."

take care of the flock, not just themselves. Three things the shepherds have done but a fourth they have not: “You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost” (Ezek 34:4). As a result the flock was scattered without a shepherd “and no-one searched or looked for them” (Ezek 34:6).

The onus to act is shown to lie directly with those who had both the responsibility and the opportunity to care for the flock. “Leadership carries an awesome responsibility.”⁴ It still does today.

The passage goes further to show the absolute importance that is placed on this task of searching for the lost: “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says; I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. . . . I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered” (Ezek 34:11, 12). This is repeated a number of times in the same passage until finally the Lord says, “I will search for the lost and bring back the strays” (Ezek 34:16). Here it is indicated that because of, and perhaps even in spite of, our failure God will find a way to do this himself.

God makes this statement again, and most powerfully through the life and mission of Jesus, who intentionally seeks out the weak, the sick, the injured, and the lost. There is a strong connection to this Old Testament passage in Jesus’ well-known New Testament parable of the lost sheep recorded in both Matt 18 and Luke 15.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

The context in Matthew’s version of the parable is in answer to the question Who

⁴“Shepherd’s False and True (34:1-31): The Accusation Against the False Shepherds (1-6),” *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 6:912.

is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He places a child in their midst and warns that anyone who causes a child to stumble would be better off to never have existed. He then tells the parable of the Lost Sheep.

His undeniable point is that even if ninety-nine are safe in the fold the shepherd will leave them all to find the one that is missing. He specifically states, "In the same way your father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matt 18:14).

Here we have the strongest possible charge to seek and to save today's "little ones" who have gone astray. In fact, seeking the lost is not seen as an option in these passages, it is definitely not a case of doing this if time and circumstances permit, but rather it is an absolute imperative to make this ministry a priority.

To back this up in Luke's gospel the parable of the Lost Sheep shows two groups in the audience, tax collectors and sinners, and Pharisees (Luke 15:1, 2). Luke 15 has Jesus reaching both groups as both are lost without Him. The focus on the lost is two fold, showing God's response to both those who do not know they are lost and to those who surely do. Luke's record is then amplified by two further parables, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son, which take in both these groups. The latter has become one of the very best known short stories in the whole Bible.

Lost Sons and Daughters

Jesus told the parable about a wayward son who rebelled and squandered his inheritance. The parable is universally known as the parable of the Prodigal Son, but in one sense it is actually more about the father than it is about the son! The father never gave up, in fact he spent his days watching for the son to return and when he saw him a

long way off “he ran to meet him, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). He then unreservedly welcomed his son back home, and threw a party for him, even killing the fatted calf.

This second parable leaves us in no doubt that the sheep of Ezekiel and the lost sheep of Matt 18 are referring to human sheep—the sons and daughters of the house of Israel. Jesus was also answering some of His critics who thought that He was running around with the wrong people, prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. Jesus’ mission was to seek and save the lost, and when they were found He showed that it was right to celebrate because what “was dead is alive again” (Luke 15:31). When criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners Jesus says, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:16-18).

This parable has become a rallying point for many mothers and fathers waiting for modern day prodigals to return. It is a timeless story that is re-enacted in countless homes and in many countries. The parable has three main characters: the prodigal son, the father, and the older brother. Another underlying message is that although the father was searching for his lost son there would have been a very different ending if he had met the older brother first when he got home! Not everyone it seems is always pleased to see the lost return!

As the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* emphasizes, “The feast, however, is not being given on the basis of merit; it is simply an expression of the father’s joy, and in this joy it is also ‘meet’ that the older brother should participate.”⁵ In

⁵“Luke,” *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 5:822.

the same way that this is the attitude that should have been shown by the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, so too should it be by the good and upright in today's church.

The three parables in Luke chapter 15 are pivotal in showing the importance that Christ placed on reaching the lost. The section in chapter 15:1-32 both defends and commends the preoccupation with the lost, and the overflowing joy at their restoration. "In the ministry of Jesus prodigals find the true and generous love of the Father."⁶ This ministry also emphasizes "God's care for those whom men often despise, His efforts to win their confidence, and His joy when they respond to his appeals."⁷

The parable ends abruptly. No hint is given as to whether the elder son amended his way or whether the younger son remained faithful thereafter. "Neither point was relevant to the lessons Jesus intended the parable to teach."⁸ The parable lays down the principle of watching and waiting for the lost to return and welcoming them back, when they have come to their senses. The welcome is with open arms and even if they choose to reject the invitation as in the case of the older brother.

Ministry of Reconciliation

Men need to be reconciled not only to each other, but to God Himself. "There are four important New Testament passages which treat the work of Christ under the figure

⁶"The Father and His Two Sons 'We Had to Make Merry' (Luke 15:11-32: Comment," *The Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. J. Nolland (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 35b:781.

⁷"Luke 15:1-7: This Parable," *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 5:815.

⁸"Luke 15:32: This Thy Brother," *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 5:823.

of reconciliation, namely Romans 5:10ff, 2 Corinthians 5:18ff, Ephesians 2:11ff and Colossians 1:19ff.”⁹ In 2 Cor 5:11-21 we are clearly shown that this reconciliation comes through Christ who now passes on to us, as His ambassadors, the same ministry of reconciliation.

It is important to stress that it is humanity who needs to be reconciled to God and not the other way around. “It is interesting to notice that no New Testament passage speaks of Christ as reconciling God to man. Always the stress is on man being reconciled.”¹⁰

“The idea of reconciliation to God implies that in the past God and man enjoyed a state of fellowship, that there now exists a state of separation and that God has taken the initiative to terminate this state of separation. Showing it is thereafter again possible for man to enjoy fellowship with God.”¹¹ In this light we are seen as God’s ambassadors, as though God were making this appeal through us. Our role is to “act as a representative . . . be an ambassador.”¹² We represent Christ as Paul shows quite clearly to the Corinthians when he states: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf. Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

This passage contains the motto of the Seventh-day Adventist youth organization; “For Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor 5:14). It shows the motive for the ministry of

⁹*The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), s.v. “Reconciliation.”

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹“2 Cor 5:18: Reconciliation,” *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 6:869.

¹²*The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1996), s.v. “4243 Presbeuo.”

reconciliation that was deemed to be of vital importance for the growing church. The same motive and ministry is just as important today. It is timeless as we remain Christ's ambassadors to the towns and cities in which we live and work.

In summary, "It is the ambassador for Christ who speaks the word of reconciliation."¹³ As such we have a central part to play in this message of reconciliation with regard to our young people who have gone astray for a time. The onus is clearly on each one of us to take up this ministry to the lost and to be an agent of reconciliation in Christ's name.

Passing on the Torch through the Generations

The Healing Ministry of God

The Bible clearly records that people turned away from God, not just individually but in large numbers, even whole generations. The Bible also reveals that God never gave up on His people and constantly aimed to remove the separation and to heal the rift. In fact He never rejected them but always loved them freely. "I will heal their backsliding (waywardness) I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as dew unto Israel" (Hos 14:4, 5).

A Lost Generation

In a postscript to the Exodus experience a graphic account is given of God's people turning away from Him and becoming lost. In Judges chapter two we read a record of disobedience and defeat. We are told that the Israelites served the Lord in the

¹³"2 Cor 5:20: As Though God," *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 6:870.

Promised Land throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. These leaders had seen first hand what God had done. They lived through the experience of collecting manna in the wilderness, of crossing the Red sea, and seeing the walls of Jericho fall down. So far so good! But read on just a few verses and you will find a very different story recorded for a later generation. “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up that neither knew the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baal’s” (Judg 2:10, 11).

From this distance it is hard to know exactly what happened but a clue seems to be provided when the text indicates that this generation did not know what had happened previously. It would seem fair to surmise that the older generation stopped telling the stories of their faith experience. Whatever the truth of the matter, this text is a hard hitting portrayal of what happens when the torch of faith is not successfully passed from one generation to another. In fact the passage goes on to say that: “They provoked the LORD to anger” (Judg 2:12).

The study of generations is without doubt a biblical theme. It is also the greatest wish of most Christian parents to be able to pass on their belief to their next generation of sons and daughters. In Proverbs we are exhorted to “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6). The idea is undoubtedly that “proper training of a child will endure throughout his life.”¹⁴ The imperative is to train and the verb indicates the idea of dedication and to this day Seventh-day Adventist

¹⁴“Family, Child Training,” *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 5:1061.

parents dedicate their children at an early age.

It is, therefore, a general principle of great merit, but not an absolute truth as it is subject to other influences. The fact is that later generations have freedom of choice and during certain periods of their lives individuals are subject to rebelling against the ways of their elders.

It is also very interesting to note here that the *SDA Bible Commentary* reflects an aspect of personal choice or natural aptitude and equates the training with instruction for a lifework.¹⁵ Other commentaries reject the idea of training according to a natural bent and look to the different ways a child can go. "In the book of Proverbs there are only two 'ways' a child can go, the way of the wise and the righteous or the ways of the fool and the wicked."¹⁶ It can be readily agreed that the Lord's desired intent is definitely for his children to renew their faith from one generation to another.

Not only is it a wish of many parents to pass on the faith but it remains one of the greatest challenges as well, and one that remains throughout life. This is the heart of what the Psalmist says in Ps 71:18, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." During the literature review some research will be shown that indicates how the modern generations are faring in this respect.

Teaching Them Diligently

Parents are given instruction concerning their responsibility to teach biblical

¹⁵"Prov 22:6: In the Way He Should Go," *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 3:1020.

¹⁶"Family, Child Training," 5:1061.

precepts to their children; “And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart: you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut 6:6, 7 NKJV). This verse is key to the Jewish understanding of faith preservation and is relevant to the subject of seeking the lost in that what is learned at the knee is never forgotten.

There is a power in early faith training that benefits both the present and the future. Ellen White spoke of the importance of the early years and commented that “the mother’s loving instruction at a tender age is what is needed by children in the formation of character.”¹⁷ From the Jesuit tradition there is also an alleged saying concerning the care and training of young children in the first seven years. This has recently been made into a documentary with an accompanying book entitled *7 Up: ‘Give Me a Child Until He is Seven, and I Will Show You the Man.’*¹⁸ This series followed fourteen British children every seven years documenting how their lives had progressed.

The important point is that early faith training benefits both the present and is also a very important key in later seeking to reach out to those who have lost their way. The reason for this is that although choice is often guided by time and circumstance the early faith training remains constant and is never entirely forgotten.

¹⁷Ellen G. White, article in *Pacific Health Journal*, September, 1897, quoted in Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1954), 301.

¹⁸Michael Apted and Bennet L. Singer, *7 Up: ‘Give Me a Child Until He Is Seven and I Will Show You the Man’* (Granada Television Documentary, 1964).

Hope for the Future

Hope for the future is not just wishful thinking! As Rob Parsons states, “God identifies with our tears at the absence of our prodigals. He shares them. But he promises us that all of our efforts and longings as parents, grandparents, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, or friends do not go unnoticed by him.”¹⁹ The following is a promise given to Israel in the Old Testament.

“Stop your crying and wipe away your tears. All that you have done for your children will not go unrewarded; they will return from the enemy’s land. There is hope for your future; your children will come back home. I, the Lord, have spoken” (Jer 31:16-17 GNB)

Whereas this text is not directly dealing with reclamation the Lord certainly had mercy on Israel and as spiritual Israel today Christian parents can also hold on to the same hope. Seeking the lost is a biblical principle that involves the shepherd caring for his sheep, the father watching daily for his wayward son’s return and each of us being an ambassador of reconciliation in the name of Christ. It also involves seeking to restore broken generations and healing their backsliding—generations that were once taught diligently by loving parents. Most of all seeking the lost gives hope for the future in a Father who still reaches out to the modern day prodigals of this world.

In summary, it is clear that searching for the lost is a biblical imperative and not an option. The recurring theme of the lost sheep shows clearly that not only are we to take the initiative in searching for the lost but also like the father in the parable of the

¹⁹Rob Parsons, *Bringing Home the Prodigals* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 19.

prodigal son we must never to give up watching, waiting, and preparing for their return. An element of risk and sacrifice is called on for the searchers (the church being the modern day shepherds) to locate the lost. Not the least of which is to make their needs paramount even over the others that remain safe in the fold. Additionally, the knowledge that has been instilled in them from birth remains a powerful tool and at the right time can become a motivating point in the decision to return. Just as the prodigal “came to his senses” (Luke 15:17b) and set out for home so too will many modern day lost sons and daughters. Our task is to make sure they meet the father first, rather than the elder brother on their return! In this ministry, however, we can be assured that we are not alone. We have God’s word on this.

In small groups across the world people are praying for prodigals and they can be assured that God is with them: “Do not be afraid for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth” (Isa 43:5).

It must never be forgotten that biblical principals for seeking the lost are about people. They are your children and my children. They are precious to us and deeply loved by God.

CHAPTER III

CURRENT RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Personal Experiences of the Problem

At the start of my ministry, like many others, I was assigned to a small two church district. In one of the church localities lived two brothers in their early twenties, who were no longer attending. At this time I will refer to them as “inactive members” as I feel that terms such as backsliders, apostates, or dropouts are inappropriate. These terms are condescending at best and downright insensitive at worst.

Alternative descriptors for modern day prodigals could be post church young people or those taking a break from church for a time. Later in the chapter we will look at the description of post church young people, but in truth there is no one politically correct or all inclusive term. Suffice it to say that I am convinced that it is very important to restore relationships when dealing with “inactive members.”¹

Their parents had divorced, and both brothers had left home, and neither now came to church. I set out to visit them, first of all to introduce myself as the new minister, and then later to spend time with them. I soon sensed that one brother was open and receptive to the visits while the other never let his guard down. I persisted in visiting largely to keep the contact with the receptive brother. As far as I can remember we

¹Fred Cornforth and Tim Lale, *Ten Who Left* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 123.

hardly ever discussed church, I am not sure I even had regular prayer with them, but we certainly established a friendship.

Often we are only a small link in the chain, and most probably not the last one. It so happened that the receptive brother started dating another inactive member, a girl that I knew and also the daughter of a well-known denominational worker. This helped to give a further point of reference and cement our friendship. Finally the two became engaged and they asked me to participate in their wedding. They also began returning to the local church and, later, when I became the local Conference Associate Youth Director, I invited them to be on the Summer Camp staff. Both had skills that were useful to the activity program and this also widened our circle of contact further.

I had moved from the district by this time and therefore our week-by-week contact ceased, although they were now friends with other members of the congregation. In this instance a widening circle of friendship became the key, although in fairness it should be stated that the older brother never showed any interest other than polite courtesies, and to the best of my knowledge remains inactive to this day.

There are undoubtedly key points in the lives of young adults when many are susceptible to becoming inactive. One of these periods is when youngsters move away from home, and leave behind their family, friends, and the local church. A habit of non-attending can easily be formed and it is felt that this can become a fixed pattern within as short a time as six weeks.²

It is therefore imperative that when students move away from home to attend

²A. Barry Gane and Steve Case, "Youth Apostasy and Recovery," *Ministry*, June 2002, 13.

university, at about eighteen or nineteen, that we help connect them to a new church family and most importantly to a new set of relationships as soon as possible. Without this taking place not only may they not find a new church but their faith development may also be adversely affected.

Faith Development

It is during these years that faith development is at a critical phase. Faith developmental theories have been espoused by James Fowler and John Westerhoff, the former outlining six stages³ and the latter four.⁴ The important fact is that faith does develop, and must do so, through a number of stages.

All stages are important but Westerhoff pinpoints his third stage of searching faith,⁵ during late adolescence, as the one where many ask questions related to what they believe. It is at this stage that many drop out of church.

A Seventh-day Adventist sociologist, V. Bailey Gillespie, develops seven major generic faith situations that further help to explain the significant features of the faith experience during the transition to adult faith.⁶ The third and fourth stages in his model of faith deal with personalizing faith during early adolescence and then establishing faith

³James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁴John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Harrisburg, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2000).

⁵*Ibid.*, 93.

⁶V. Bailey Gillespie, *The Experience of Faith* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988).

in later youth. This is the same key point, as in the other models, in developing a lasting faith. “Established faith is God’s ideal for the church: an identity in God.”⁷

Yet it is at this precise time of critical faith development that often youth are dislocated from their home, church, and friends. In so doing the faith development process may be stalled and some youth unwittingly find themselves on the drop-out track. The church must take great care of its youth at this time, and part of this will involve understanding the differences current research is indicating in respect of male and female spirituality.

Male and Female Spirituality

Physical and emotional differences between boys and girls have been well catalogued over the adolescent years but it also seems that adolescent brains may also develop at different stages and not complete the process until the early twenties. “It is important to be aware that the brain’s centre of reasoning and problem-solving, the prefrontal cortex, is the last to mature, and that the brain is not fully developed until the early 20s.”⁸ If this is indeed true it would also have a significant role to play in the way inactive boys and girls may or may not come to their senses and decide to return from their “far country” experience.

Understanding adolescence is an important factor in the equation. Generally it is recognized that puberty is a time when rapid physical, emotional, and sexual developmental changes take place. This leads to rapid changes that are a challenge to all

⁷Ibid., 81.

⁸M. Carr-Gregg, *The Princess Bitchface Syndrome: Surviving Adolescent Girls* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 2006), 9.

concerned. “Adolescence is a birthing process. As we move from childhood to adulthood, there is a dawning awareness of the pleasures of friendship, romance, and sexuality—all these accompany expanding physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities.”⁹ Physical and emotional differences between boys and girls have been well catalogued over the years but as noticed above it also seems that adolescent brains may also develop during this time and thus play a significant part in the way boys and girls view their spirituality.

Looking first at boys, the specific issue of male spirituality has recently come to the fore. It been observed that males are increasingly missing from the church, “Barna research points out that just 35 percent of men in the United States attend church weekly. In Europe it is five percent.”¹⁰ Also, as we will see later, the European Valuegenesis study clearly shows that men are far less comfortable in talking about their faith to their children.¹¹ Women seem to do this naturally, but for men it does not seem to come easily at all.

It would not be too dramatic to say that in the Western world, if not everywhere, male spirituality is under threat. This may represent one of the biggest discipleship challenges facing the twenty-first century church.

Females also have their own issues, not the least that their brains develop differently than their male counterparts. “Put simply, girl’s brains are more

⁹Mark Yaconelli, “Prayer a Home for the Homeless,” *Youthwork*, May 2008, 19.

¹⁰Minner Labrador Jr., “The Missing Men,” *Ministry*, February 2008, 5.

¹¹The European Valuegenesis study was conducted in 17 Unions of the Euro-Africa Division and the Trans-European Division in 2006/07. The Research stage is being conducted in 2008/09.

decentralized, using a variety of parts or locations for a single task, whereas boys only use one side of their brain and process one thing at a time. Thus for adolescent girls the combination of biological changes, inbuilt brain programming, and external factors set the stage for a confused and at times tumultuous inner world.”¹² This can also lead them to thinking about their world earlier than their male counterparts. This awareness, and their subsequent drive for independence, and forging their own identity, can sometimes bring about sudden challenges relating to home church and other forms of perceived authority.

A good work has been done in the church in more recent years through Women’s Ministries, yet purely by observation it would seem that these events are largely frequented by older women. It is rare to see late teens or those in their early twenties at these programs. Yet understanding the issues outlined above there is definitely a need for specific care and nurture of mid and late teenage girls, at a time when so many big decisions are being made in their lives.

Never has a generation of youth been so studied and an overview of the major surveys begins to highlight the decisions being made and the issues at hand.

North American and Australian Valuegenesis Youth Surveys

Over the last decade or so there have been a number of significant studies that have given good insight into the life and thinking of the Adventist young person. The young adult Valuegenesis studies in the Seventh-day Adventist church are to-date best documented from North America and Australia.

¹²Carr-Gregg, 66.

The largest Valuegenesis study has been carried out in North America among over 11,000 sixth to twelfth grade children and youth attending Adventist schools. These results have been extensively documented.¹³ The Valuegenesis 1 study was carried out in 1990 and then ten years later was followed up by the Valuegenesis 2 study.¹⁴

These studies gave an important window into the lives and thinking of Seventh-day Adventist youth. There was much news to rejoice over in these studies as well as some findings that acted as a wake up call to the church, including the realization that our youth had little assurance of their salvation. This has led to a revision of thinking, for instance in Bible teaching for children, and was the catalyst for the Gracelink series of Sabbath School lessons.

One of the Valuegenesis findings was that “the three faith environments of home, school, and church are all vital in nourishing a faith maturity and denominational loyalty that will aid in retaining our youth for Christ and the church.”¹⁵ The survey had over 350 questions which related to a number of major scales giving a vast plethora of useful information.

Looking further at the Denominational Loyalty scale it became clear that loyalty to the church was strong among those surveyed; “Loyalty to Adventism appears to be high. Over 90% gave at least some importance to attending an Adventist church in

¹³Roger L. Dudley, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, CA: L.S.U. Press, 1992).

¹⁴V. Bailey Gillespie and Michael J. Donahue, *Valuegenesis: Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations* (Riverside, CA: Hancock Center Publications, 2004).

¹⁵Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, 79.

contrast to that of another faith, three-fourths was satisfied with the Adventist church, and 90% would find another Adventist congregation if they relocated.”¹⁶ So far so good.

One of the questions projected ahead to loyalty at age forty. “In Valuegenesis 1 (72%) replied that there was a good or excellent chance that they would be Adventist at age 40. Only (2%) saw there was no chance, with another (7%) foreseeing a small chance.”¹⁷ When this same question was asked ten years later scores for each grade ranged from 73% (grades 9-12) to 77% (grade 6) indicating that there was a good or excellent chance that they would be an Adventist at age forty.¹⁸ At face value it is encouraging in that three quarters of our youth were evidently thinking in terms of a long term commitment.

Statistics, however, are open to more than one interpretation. The above figures also indicate that between 23% and 27% of the same youth do not intend to still be an Adventist at age forty. When extrapolated into raw figures that represents a very large number of our youth. Also, when I personally asked this question to the top class at an Adventist high school in Sweden one very perceptive young lady told me that she hoped she would be at forty but she was not so sure about next year. In other words it is today that counts and predicting the future is not an exact science at all.

Observing from a distance I also think there may have been a significant gap in the survey sample. Of the 11,000 youth in the first survey process statistics record that

¹⁶Dudley, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*, 73.

¹⁷Gillespie and Donahue, 63.

¹⁸Ibid.

82% were baptized members and the other 18% saw themselves as Adventists.¹⁹ The survey, however, was conducted in SDA schools and as such all still had a connection with the church school and most were also regularly attending church. Over 80% were in fact recorded as attending church at least weekly.²⁰

The survey was centered on those who attended the Adventist education system. This is completely valid and the information gained was definitely invaluable. The area, however, not covered in this Valuegenesis survey related to those who were outside of both the school system or who had already become inactive in their church attendance? As such any issues relating to why this group may not attend church were not included in the survey.

The survey from the South Pacific Division, however, did address this gap and looked at reasons why youth may leave the church. The resulting information gave a very interesting list that appears in descending order from the reason most given for non-attendance.

1. Adult members are leading phony lives.
2. The church places too much emphasis on non-essentials.
3. Attitude of older members is critical and uncaring.
4. Church leaders are preoccupied with organization, not concerned with people.
5. Worship services are dull and meaningless.
6. Do not want to be a hypocrite.
7. Attracted to a different lifestyle.

¹⁹Dudley, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*, 110.

²⁰Ibid.

8. Do not have any real friends at church.

9. Church does not allow me to think for myself.²¹

Commenting on this Barry Gane and Steve Case note that “many use any or a number of these reasons as an excuse to experiment with the world.”²² This seems to be a very pertinent reflection with today’s post-modern mindset and will lead to a question that needs to be addressed later in this paper, as to what can be done about this hemorrhaging of our youth in today’s society.²³

Very few Adventist writers have addressed this subject although articles by Barry Gane have appeared in a number of Adventist journals over the years. In one such article he challenges the church with the hard hitting statement: “We spend millions of dollars on evangelism often forgetting that our own youth need to be saved.”²⁴

A question that keeps recurring relates to the scale of the problem. How many youth are being lost? This has been very hard to quantify over the years for the precise reason that no one seems to have really known for sure. The foremost Adventist researcher over the last decades has been Roger Dudley and a further study of his gives probably the most definitive answer.

Before moving on to this it should be stated that I believe we cannot look at reclaiming youth in total isolation. Inevitably the issue of retaining youth and plugging

²¹Gane and Case, 12.

²²Ibid.

²³It is a shame that the Australian Valuegenesis survey has not gained as much publicity as with the North American edition and that the findings have gone largely unnoticed to a wider church audience.

²⁴A. Barry Gane, “Reclaiming Lost Youth,” *Journal of Adventist Youth Ministry*, (Fall 1992): 58.

the gaps that exist must be addressed in unison otherwise not only will the church keep losing more youth but also those who return may actually leave the same way again. Retention and reclamation, therefore, form a dynamic duality.

Ten Year Longitudinal Study-Why Teenagers Leave the Church

Dudley carried out a ten-year research project with a group of 1,534 baptized American Adventist youth aged fifteen and sixteen years of age at the commencement of the survey. His study is well documented and has given the church a benchmark from which to work.

At the outset of the study he reviewed a number of previous studies and clearly stated that at that time no one knew for sure either how many Adventist youth were leaving or the full reasons why they did so. However, he confidently stated, “But we are on the way toward finding out.”²⁵ Ten years later, when his sample group was now twenty-five and twenty-six years of age he had a much fuller picture to share.

Over the years the recipients received annual follow up questionnaires, and at the end of the project he reported the following finding. “Young people who are brought up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and who have been baptized by their mid-teens leave the church in large numbers by the time they reach their mid 20s . . . that dropout rate likely runs between 40% and 50%.”²⁶ It is interesting that this figure confirmed a

²⁵Roger L. Dudley and Janet L. Kangas, *The World of the Adventist Teenager* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1990), 13.

²⁶Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, 93.

much smaller survey done by Ila Zbaraschuk in 1973²⁷ where she too estimated that 50 percent of Adventist adolescents sever their church connections.

Dudley's research led him to make the further significant statement: "The church can have no higher priority than stemming the loss of young adults and winning back those who have left its ranks."²⁸ It is that serious and it was refreshing to see that Dudley began to address the problem in the chapter of the same book entitled "Coming Home." Here he reported on a key question that was asked in the survey, "How likely is it that you might return to the Adventist Church someday?" He reports: "Despite the pain 26% said it was somewhat likely and 15% said it was *very* likely that they might become Seventh-day Adventists again someday. Another third were uncertain making the picture appear hopeful for nearly three fourths of the dropouts from the survey. Only about a fourth said it was unlikely that they would return."²⁹

Following this through a little further he also found that the main reason that would contribute to their return would be a result of relationships either with God, family, or friends. This research gives considerable encouragement for a relational-based ministry of reclamation and is an area that will be followed up later in this paper.

Dudley's work was the basis of a 2001 Andrews University Doctor of Philosophy dissertation by Gyung Gu Kim.³⁰ In this study Kim looked at the youth's perception,

²⁷Ila Zbaraschuk, "Why Young Adventists Leave the Church," *Insight*, September 11, 1973, 10-14.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 93.

³⁰Gyung Gu Kim, "A Longitudinal Study of Seventh-day Adventist Adolescents Through Young Adulthood Concerning Retention In Or Disaffection From The Church" (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, School of Education, 2001), 143, 144.

attitudes, and religious commitment resulting from their experiences within the home, church, and school. He used the ten-year longitudinal study to chart both the positive and negative influences. The positive influences were, in descending order, (1) teacher encouraged thinking, (2) giving tithe regularly, (3) involvement in the church, and (4) agreement with distinctive Adventist doctrines. The negative influences were (1) teacher emphasized rules and regulations, (2) anti-traditional Adventist behavior, (3) mother's indifference, and (4) rejection.

An earlier PhD study by Janet Leigh Kangas had reflected on a former ten-year longitudinal study in the 1980s which Roger Dudley had also been involved in. Again, here the study group was baptized fifteen and sixteen year old Seventh-day Adventist members in North America. The focus of the study was the religious attitudes of these youth related to their family, educational, and church backgrounds.

In the realm of the family the mother's influence was found to be crucial. Relating to education it was found that youth relate better to talking, discussion, and asking questions as opposed to lectures and one-way methods of learning. Looking at the church, agreement with standards and regular attendance at worship services was seen to be key factors in retention and the reflection was made that "teenagers are more apt to attend a caring church than a non-caring church."³¹

It was also seen that significant others forming relationships with youth and together with parent's helping youngsters to attend may do more by building warm

³¹Janet Leigh Kangas, "A Study of Religious Attitudes and Behaviors of Seventh-day Adventist Adolescents in North America Related to Their Family, Educational and Church Backgrounds" (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, School of Education, 1988), 176.

relationships than the actual fact of attendance alone. The importance of relationships was relevant in all areas.

It must be realized, however, that the Seventh-day Adventist church is not alone in facing this dilemma. All other denominations are dealing with the same issue and there is further documentation available from other Christian studies that help give further insights into this problem.

Baptist Youth Study—Youth Ministry That Lasts

Wesley Black, Professor of Student Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, conducted a study to determine factors involved in why some youth who are faithful and active in church and religious life go on to remain faithful and active in young adulthood, while many others do not. Black states, “A perennial frustration of youth ministers is how to address the problem of large numbers of their faithful youth who graduate from high school and seemingly graduate from church and religious involvement.”³² He studied 1,362 young adults aged 18-30 and the results of this study indicated that relational components, family components, teen faith and practices, and young adult religious practices were all associated with continued religious participation following high school graduation.

It is interesting that this study pinpointed high school graduation as the seminal point with a weakening of faith during college days. The writer found a tendency for older adolescents to drop out and after this life stage the attendance at religious services dropped dramatically. Appendix A shows in chart form some of the reasons young adults

³²Wesley Black, “Youth Ministry That Lasts: The Faith Journey of Young Adults,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 19-48.

do attend church, with relationships being at the top. Conversely appendix B shows the reasons of those who no longer attended church. Here there was a difference between active youth who may not have a strong commitment, or non-active youth who found that church had lost its appeal.

This study from another Christian denomination is useful as it both highlighted perceived implications for Youth Ministry, Family Ministry, and Young Adult Ministry as well as acting as a reference point for our own church studies.

MARC Europe: Reaching and Keeping Teenagers

Other significant studies have also taken place and here I would like to refer to two such European studies. In 1992 a British researcher, Peter Brierley, undertook a major survey of teenagers and their attitudes. Brierley is a former European director of MARC Europe and is now the Executive Director of the Christian Research Association. His findings have been published in a book entitled *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers* in which he makes the observation, “Teenagers who are leaving the churches are not necessarily abandoning Christianity but are rejecting ‘belonging’ or ‘involvement’ or whatever relates them to the adult world into a world of their own.”³³ Allied to this is the understanding that “it is not so much Christianity that teenagers reject as the church.”³⁴

³³Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, 55.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 174.

Brierley outlines a seven step approach to reaching and keeping teenagers including aspects such as strengthening the commitment to under twelves, holding special youth services and focusing on making their faith special.³⁵

There is certainly evidence that teenagers are also rejecting the church in Europe in large numbers. The results of the English church census of 1989 showed that there were 155,000 fewer teenagers attending the church than a decade earlier in 1979. This number equated to a net fall out of 300 teenagers every week.³⁶ As the Bishop of Southwark recognized, “We have moved from where Christianity is culture to where Christianity is choice.”³⁷ This choice first rears its head during the teenage years and as Brierley states: “We want young people both to choose Christianity and to stay with it. The teenage years are years of transition and we have to help in these periods.”³⁸

As well as paying attention to the teenage years there is a coming realization that to help correct choices being made at this age churches must also focus more on the younger age groups. A later 2001 Raikes survey led to a book by the same author entitled *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*. In this study they found that “tweenagers decide for the church whilst they are still children, mostly when 7 to 10 years of age.”³⁹ This led to the recommendation that churches need to first concentrate on their youth work to the under twelves and allied to this is the need of following this up with further

³⁵Ibid., 229-243.

³⁶Ibid., 23.

³⁷Ibid., 243.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Peter Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers* (London: Christian Research, 2002), 192.

concentration on the 11-14 age group. Then when decisions are faced at the 14-plus age there is a stronger foundation upon which to draw.

English Church Attendance Survey 1998–The Tide Is Running Out

A more recent study has been carried out by the Anglican Church and has resulted in the book *The Tide Is Running Out*. This reflects on the English Church Attendance Survey (ECAS) of 1998 and analysis has revealed the following strong recommendations:

1. The Church is one generation from extinction.
2. The number of young people attending up to age 19 had halved since the last survey.
3. The number of young people attending in their 20's was down 45%.
4. The number attending in their 30's and 40's was down 20%.
5. The number attending from 45-65 was down 15%.
6. The number attending aged 65 and over was up 4%.⁴⁰

In conclusion the ECAS summary noted the following strong recommendations to address the problem:

1. Focus urgently on children
2. Continue to focus on teens and 20's where the church is weakest—bring young people into leadership.
3. Encourage personal spirituality—especially among the 30's and 40's.
4. Teach church and non church people Christian faith.

⁴⁰Ibid., 9, 10.

5. Challenge churchgoers to foster friendships with unbelievers.
6. Enable older people to reach out in mission while we still have them.
7. Expect and plan to manage strategic change. The existing church needs radical overhaul and renewal.⁴¹

The message is quite clear, the church must focus heavily on children, teens and those in their twenties. In doing this, the challenge will be for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to also admit that it is in need of overhaul and renewal. This does not mean that the church needs to change the doctrines but it does mean that it needs to change both how church is done and also overhaul the overall approach to winning and keeping the youth.

A Churchless Faith

A study in Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches categorized five types of adult leavers, namely; disillusioned or displaced believers; reflective exiles; transitional explorers; transitioning to an alternative faith; and integrated wayfinders. The study took in 162 interviews with both church leavers (108 interviewees) and leaders (54 interviewees.)⁴²

The first group (disillusioned believers) have typically become hurt or angry but hope to return sometime in the future, which may well fit the description of some of the youth I interview in chapter four of this study.

⁴¹Ibid., 238.

⁴²Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2002).

The second group (reflective exiles) indicated that they had put their faith down for a little while and left it. This is another characteristic that seems to be common in some of the young adult or college age students I interviewed.

The third and fourth groups (transitional explorers and transitioning to an alternative faith) introduce the concept of transition, which we will explore further in chapter five. The last group (integrated wayfarers) are reconstructing their faith and trying to fit it into all aspects of their lives. The term wayfarer is given on purpose and again represents a journey or a way forward in their faith.

This study was followed up five years later and examined where these people now were in their journeys of faith. In this study the leavers are entitled post-church groups or people and provides the following definition: “Describing a person or group as ‘post-church’ indicates that their previous participation in an ‘established church’ context has ceased,”⁴³ This seems an apt description of many in today’s generation while also giving the view of a journey that may or may not have ended. I feel this view to be important.

It also indicates that just as people leave for different reasons then they may well return for different reasons as well. Five years did not show any significant return rate and yet a longer period may well begin to do so. In the final strategy we will seek to recognize that there are different paths home.

European Valuegenesis Survey 2006/07

The European Valuegenesis survey followed from the American and Australian surveys in the new millennium with the marked difference that this was conducted as a

⁴³Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh, and Adrienne Thompson, *Church Leavers: Faith Journeys Five Years On* (London: SPCK, 2006), 13.

web-based survey. Also it is church, family, and society based rather than school based. The method of collecting data was likewise church rather than school based.

Seventeen Unions from both the Euro-Africa and Trans-European Division participated and over six thousand responses were received. The 14-25 age group surveyed was also different from the North American sample that initially looked at high school age students largely within Adventist schools. In Europe there are few denominational schools so by necessity most of the respondents were church rather than school based. At the time of writing the preliminary raw score results have been received by each Union with further research, leading to future publications, is being carried out throughout 2008/2009.

The survey had over three hundred questions and incorporated many different scales but the last question (335) has particular bearing to the future intentions of the youth. It repeated the essence of a question asked in the original American survey about their future intentions: "In twenty years time, do you think you will be active in the Adventist Church?" As outlined in appendix C the responses to this question show the encouraging figures that 52% answered definitely, 41% probably, and only just under 7% answered no or unlikely. The no or unlikely figure is significantly less than the North American sample, but of course the difference in the age group sampled as well as other factors such as the church, as opposed to school, base of the European sample may be significant here.

The challenge, however, is to not only keep the 52% but also to help disciple the 41% and turn their intentions into reality. While at the same time not forgetting the 7%

who may at this point of time be negative about their future intentions concerning church involvement, but who remain very important to the church.

Although the final results of all the scales are not yet out some important themes for the future have begun to emerge. Feeding the core of our youth rather than defaulting to entertaining the fringe⁴⁴ has been stressed in the initial reports. This refers to an intentional strategy of focusing on the active group within the church without ignoring those on the fringe. This points to a discipleship emphasis and will be reflected in the resulting Strategic Plan that will be presented in chapter five of this paper.

Each participating Union is now being encouraged to turn this principal, of feeding the core, into a working reality as far as its youth ministry is concerned.

Other Literature and Current Church Programs

The world Seventh-day Adventist church has also come to the realization that the issue of lost members is an urgent one. At the 2005 General Conference session one of the main delegate discussion sessions looked at this issue and the GC then followed this up in the Annual Council of the same year. Delegates to the Annual Council voted to study membership retention to find out why baptized members are leaving the church. An action was voted recommending that unions and conference/missions make their own studies and report findings to the divisions. "An amendment voted at the session set Annual Council 2007 as the date when this study should be completed and presented to

⁴⁴Manuela Casti and Stephen Currow, "European Valuegenesis Survey Report" (report presented at a Trans-European Division Executive meeting, DeBron, Holland, September 2007).

the delegates.”⁴⁵ In reality this has been found to be a hard exercise to undertake and more time has been necessary to complete the task.

When this recommendation came to the subsequent Trans-European Division Winter Meeting I made the observation from the floor that if the church only studies baptized members we will miss a significant number of youth who grow up in church families but for one reason or another either delay their choice for baptism or indeed never take this step. These are the silent ones who often drift away unnoticed!

Meanwhile Bringing Home Adventist Prodigals is also one of the five main Global initiatives that the church has chosen to address during the five-year period from 2005-2010. The General Conference Youth Ministries department reacted quickly and decided to receive a paper on the subject during the 2006 quinquennial Youth Advisory. I was asked to take on the assignment of preparing the paper and facilitating break-out groups that would seek to make further recommendations. As World Youth leader, Baraka Muganda, observed “We’ve got to act.”⁴⁶

In preparation for the assignment it was important to discover what other recent resources and programs already existed. In addition to a bibliography of books on the subject the following five existing initiatives, spread over three continents, are particularly noteworthy in that they have an already established approach aimed at reaching out to missing members. This may by no means be an exhaustive list but are each noteworthy for the practical initiatives that are being offered.

1. Heart Call. Women Reaching Women Who Are Taking a Break from Church

⁴⁵S. Blackner, “Annual Council Report,” *Adventist World*, December 2005, 5.

⁴⁶B. Muganda, e-mail to author, November 12, 2005.

This program is an initiative of Women's Ministries in NAD and has been widely adopted in a number of other areas. It sets out a curriculum for twelve meetings each with a separate focus, ranging from "Why do women leave church?" in session one, to "What type of celebration events can be held to welcome back former members in our church?" in session twelve. The program is well resourced and comes in a pack complete with video and work books. As such it is probably one of the most complete denominational programs already in existence dealing with a reclamation ministry and in addition to the further work in this area organized by the NAD Ministerial department.

2. Center for Creative Ministry

The center for creative ministry is situated in Lincoln, Nebraska and publishes a quarterly publication entitled *Together Again*. Its aim is to create a network of friends reaching friends who leave the church. The magazine includes features on welcoming home young adults as well as featuring a Homecoming Sabbath, the fourth Sabbath in November, which "provides the opportunity for local churches to create a special program to which to invite former and inactive members."⁴⁷

3. Care for the Family. Bringing Home the Prodigals UK Tour

Care for the Family is a Cardiff, Wales based charity that has produced magazines, DVDs, and books in conjunction with a UK-wide speaking tour. The focus on the tour is preparing for our prodigals' return, and is fronted by Rob Parsons, a noted author and speaker on the subject.

Following a very successful tour in 2005 they moved on to hosting a 2006

⁴⁷C. Myers, "Welcoming Home Young Adults," *Together Again*, September 2004, 11:3.

Conference entitled *Building a Prodigal Friendly Church*. The rationale is that having highlighted the problem “the Church needs to be a loving family ready to truly welcome prodigals home.”⁴⁸

In his book, *Bringing Home the Prodigals*, Rob Parsons makes a number of key points, including the observation that the church has made some youngsters prodigals who never really were in the first place. This is because of focusing too much on non-essentials. He also urges the church to be ready for their return and quotes the words an old man had spoken that had made a great impression on him; “When the Father’s house is filled with the Father’s love, the prodigals will come home.”⁴⁹ He then identifies the greatest obstacle to the return of the prodigals being the state of the church.

Rob Parsons ministry is widely accepted across denominations and he has recently been invited to speak at a UK SDA training program dealing with reclaiming prodigals. Having attended two of his UK tour venues, as well as reading his book, there is no doubt that his work is one of the major influences upon my research into the topic.

4. 10 Ways To Build bridges of Understanding to Former Adventists

This is a strategic nurture initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in SPD. They have produced a number of practical ministry leaflets and one by this name sets out a ten-step approach:

1. Stay Friends
2. Listen to the stories
3. Seize the initiative—quickly

⁴⁸Jeff L. Lucas and R. Hardy, “Welcome Home,” *Family*, Spring 2006, 10.

⁴⁹Parsons, 79.

4. Do not react
5. Respect the person
6. Check your church's health
7. Check for absent members
8. Be prepared to work through the situation
9. Take formal action slowly
10. Assess the church's involvement

Some practical experiments had also been embarked upon, and I have been told of a website which had been set up trying to bridge with former Adventists. It was apparently entitled *Bridges to You* but the untimely death of two of the lead members may have in recent years curtailed its effectiveness.

5. Review and Herald Initiative

The Review and Herald Publishing Association has recently launched an initiative that seeks to bring children back to God.⁵⁰ It has the following two main emphases: (1) bringing our children back to God, and (2) bringing our children back to church. With the first of these two initiatives they set aside two weeks from September 11, 2008 to pray for children and family members.

In relation to this *Guide* magazine will also be launching a project called "Guide a Friend to Jesus." It involves "a special monthly edition of *Guide* designed to reach former attendees, along with their friends and relatives outside the Adventist church."⁵¹ This represents one of the largest efforts ever to reach out to young people.

⁵⁰Unpublished letter to World Divisions, September 2008.

⁵¹Ibid., 3.

Books and Other Studies

Further books dealing with the subject are included in the bibliography at the end of the paper. There are an increasing number published recently that analyze the problem in general terms, but I was intrigued by Monte Sahlin's reference specifically identifying second generation Adventists in the foreword to the book *Ten Who Left*. He states that the second generation Adventist is a special kind of person. "By second-generation I mean all of us who grew up in an Adventist home, whether we be literally second, third, fourth, fifth or even sixth in generations of Adventists in our family."⁵²

He then goes on to explain the reason for this statement: "We often cannot point to a particular date for our conversion experience, and we do not have spectacular conversion stories to tell just the fact that we learned about God each day of our lives. We have been well exposed to both the highest values and the worst cases of Adventist life and institutions."⁵³

In dealing with those who leave the church people are so often dealing with "second-generation" Adventists according to Sahlin's definition. That is not to say that some new converts do not drift away again, they do, and this poses its own set of problems. By and large, however, the silent exodus out of the back door is that of our own flesh and blood. They are children of the Adventist baby boom.

It is my conviction that as an Adventist Church we simply cannot go on any longer spending millions of dollars on Global Mission and Church Planting initiatives

⁵²Monte Sahlin, foreword to *Ten Who Left*, by Fred Cornforth and Tim Lale (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 10, 11.

⁵³Ibid.

aimed at reaching new people groups, as good as these initiatives undoubtedly are, while at the same time leaving the back door open for many of our youth to simply slip away unnoticed. That is not to say that we should stop evangelizing—we will die as a church if we do so—but it is to say that we must seriously address the question of disaffected youth before it is too late. It is also my strongly held conviction that this is not a youth problem alone. As Merton Strommen indicates, “Loss of faith is an issue that is no respecter of age.”⁵⁴

In this respect, although it is the youth who gain attention when they leave, it should be noted that if those in their thirties and forties lose their spirituality then it is also their children that will suffer! The English Church Attendance survey indicated that 20 percent fewer of this age group was attending so it is a fair comment to say that we cannot just look at youth in isolation, as what happens to the parents has an undoubted knock-on effect. This fact must not be taken lightly by the church. Later in the chapter on field research it will be evident that we are also losing young adults in their thirties from the Adventist Church.

All is not lost, however, as Strommen also highlights, “We face a decade or two of opportunity that ought not to be ignored. Why? Because every major denomination is losing a major segment of its youth! Now is the time to bend the course of history with respect to youth and reverse the trend of non-involvement. Now is the time to minister to their growing interest in spiritual experience.”⁵⁵ Now is the time to act.

⁵⁴Merton P. Strommen, *The Five Cries of Youth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 157.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 142.

I conducted my own research to see what is happening in the lives of contemporary European youth. The results of this research are documented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE EUROPEAN CHALLENGE—FIELD RESEARCH

Focus Groups

The Field research was comprised of two parts. The initial approach consisted of focus group questions which were addressed by concerned adults who attended three youth/family weekends. The first group was in attendance at a British Union Conference training seminar for those working with teenagers (2005). The second group was at a parenting seminar in Israel (2005), which is part of the TED territory and the third group was among those who attended a prodigal's day in St Albans, Hertfordshire (2006).

The questionnaire, shown in appendix D, consisted of the following six questions:

1. As a church how can we nurture our children in a way that establishes their faith in Jesus Christ?
2. When the teenage drive for independence begins to lead them to reject parental values, what practical steps can a church take to help families?
3. What do you think are the three most important things that a church can do if someone stops attending church?
4. What do you consider are the key points in life when a person may be influenced to think again on spiritual matters?
5. From your observations what are the main reasons people return to church or faith again?

6. What can we do to help people feel accepted and involved when they return to church?

The question that all three groups focused on in some detail was number three. I particularly wanted to find the most common ideas that a church can put into practice if young people stop attending. With this in mind the following six themes returned time and again:

1. Pray for them
2. Keep in touch
3. Visit them
4. Invite them back
5. Find out why they left
6. Love them

Of these six, the two that constantly reoccurred were (1) to pray for them, and (2) to keep in touch. Looking a little closer at what people meant by keeping in touch, they usually referred to some sort of contact that included email, text, or telephone. Where they stated to visit them, it was quite clear that face-to-face contact was being envisaged.

At face value this seems to be an obvious conclusion and yet, as Barry Gane and Steve Case point out, Dudley's research shows that in reality the church seems very loath to do this and that "only about 15 per cent of youth who stop coming to church ever receive a follow-up visit or even a call from anyone at church."¹ That is one of the most profoundly disturbing statistics that I have found in this study. "It has been estimated that there may be between one or two million former Seventh-day Adventists in North

¹Gane and Case, 13.

America.”² There is no corresponding figure for Europe but the trend is undoubtedly the same. This means in practical terms that there are in all possibilities as many former members in a given country as are currently actively attending church. This is a situation that quite simply must be addressed.

The St. Albans focus group had specifically requested a Sabbath totally focusing on Adventist prodigals. In the morning the sermon featured the Parable of the Lost Son and culminated with a very moving exercise where people came forward and placed the names of inactive youth, and other loved ones, on slips of paper and placed them in baskets at the foot of the cross. These names were then prayed for in a corporate prayer and then members were encouraged to take the names home and to continue praying for them. This followed closely the number one suggestion given by all the groups. Over lunch a smaller group then addressed all six questions.

Following were some of the main themes that were addressed:

Q1. As a church how can we nurture our children in a way that establishes their faith in Jesus Christ?

Sabbath School was seen as a major nurturing influence for children and it was also seen as important to help parents be involved in the overall nurturing process. A theme that I will return to later in the paper is based on a family-based model for youth ministry, aimed at supporting and resourcing the core family base.

Q2. When the teenage drive for independence begins to lead them to reject parental values, what practical steps can a church take to help families?

²Cornforth and Lale, 119.

Mentoring was mentioned as a means of helping parents when youth decide to reject home values. It was not spelled out how this would happen but the nature of the discussion involved a significant other, and more mature Christian, helping guide a younger member. This should not be seen as a quick fix as “showing love with skin on is more than a one day a week commitment. It requires seven days a week.”³ Also a support system for the family and a forum for discussion with the teenager were seen as important.

Q3. What do you think are the three most important things that a church can do if someone stops attending church?

The same answers as given above were re-iterated with regards to a church’s response when someone stops attending, namely much prayer and keeping in touch with the young person. There was a dichotomy expressed between not applying pressure but also to keep inviting them as one of the group to “relevant, non-criinge, excellent meetings.” By this they meant that any meeting that returning youth were invited to must be well thought through, well executed, and definitely not one that could be potentially embarrassing in either its scope or form.

Q4. What are the key points in life when a person may be influenced to think again on spiritual matters?

There was considerable agreement that the key life stages where a person may be influenced again to think on spiritual matters included times when things go wrong, e.g., financial, relationships, health issues, etc. In addition, there are times when things go

³B. McGhee, “Show Them a God with Skin On,” in *We Can Keep Them in the Church*, ed. Myrna Tetz and Gary Hopkins (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2004), 150.

well, e.g., marriage and birth of children. The latter life stage is associated with bringing children to church and Sabbath School.

Q5. From your observations what are the main reasons people return to church or faith again?

This question was similar to number four and included again both positive and negative factors. A positive factor being re-establishing relationships with the young person, and a negative factor being when they acknowledge themselves the shallowness of life.

Q6. What can we do to help people feel accepted and involved when they return to church?

The main thoughts to helping people feel accepted when they returned to church involved befriending them and inviting them to social functions as well as helping them become involved. The involvement could be in youth meetings or a small group if they are older.

Having found some common themes with the focus groups it was important to now hear from some inactive youth themselves.

Youth Survey

The purpose of the youth survey was to hear from young people themselves and also act as a pilot project in reaching out to inactive youth. Although all the interviews were conducted in one country the findings were planned from the outset to be presented to the Trans-European Division (TED) youth directors, so that the underlying trends could be extrapolated for use within a wider scope of the division territory.

The questionnaire was formed with the desire to gain significant information while still giving the youth a chance to express their feelings. It was deliberately constructed to be completed in a short period of time, and hence consisted of twelve key questions. It was also important to ensure anonymity.

Most of the questions were designed to reflect a progression from the past to the future. Two questions, number eight (a list of possible reasons from another study why youth do not attend church) and number ten (Do you think you may come back to church one day?) were included as a result from feedback in the preparation process.

Question number eight specifically gave the opportunity to compare the results with the far larger SPD Valuegenesis study where the same list of reasons was used. This also reflects the duality of retention and reclamation in the study. Question ten directly asks whether young people feel they may return and is in that sense a key question in looking at reclamation. This question quite deliberately had a second open element asking what would encourage them to return.

The questionnaire provided for both quantitative and qualitative responses. It is acknowledged that the interviewer knew many of the respondents as most once attended the same church (Stanborough Park, England). This was in fact a deliberate part of the pilot project strategy in that if visitation is to be successful in other local churches it will almost certainly be carried out by members that the inactive youth know well.

It was originally envisaged that the core group interviewed would be between fourteen and twenty-five years of age, as it is during these years that many youth first become inactive and, secondly, because this is the age that the European Valuegenesis research project also used as their target age group. Although most respondents were in

this age group, it became evident that young adults in their twenties and thirties⁴ remain missing from church so some from this extended age group were also interviewed.

I began the process by meeting with the local youth pastor who had drawn up a list of 43 inactive youth. My target was to receive back at least 20 responses and forms were sent out by a mixture of post, email, or personal contact. It soon became clear that receiving a 50 percent return of surveys from the original list of 43 names was not realistic.

The net was then widened to include youth who had attended either another nearby church in St. Albans, or who had more distant links with the churches through friends or other means. Two who fell into this latter category were a young man I met at a youth day in Scotland who confessed that he did not attend the local church at all, and another young lady who used to attend the first church I ministered in and who I had studied with for baptism. In total 22 responses were ultimately received back from a final list of 55 names.

This equates to a very creditable 40 percent return. While recognizing that this was only a limited pilot project, and that the total sample is not statistically significant, it does still show the importance of a local project. The key fact was that youngsters were contacted and that in like manner the pilot could easily be replicated in another setting.

In analyzing the returns it became apparent that females responded more readily than males to cold forms received through the post. When the messages were personalized to youth who I had some form of personal contact with then the responses were good from both genders. This highlighted again the importance of the local church

⁴Brierley, *The Tide Is Running Out*, 238.

being involved in reaching out to its own non-attending youth. The best people to make the contact are those who are either known or who have a readily identifiable link to them or their family.

One young man that I contacted by e-mail was actually away on a non church-related humanitarian project in Africa. We had not spoken for a number of years since he had attended the local church and church school, but he responded readily to a personalized e-mail. Another female, who was not on my list at all, responded to the survey after she was contacted by her cousin. This shows that an internal network often exists. She e-mailed saying that she had found completing the survey to be therapeutic as it enabled her to articulate her thoughts and past experiences in relation to the church.

Some on the initial list still had tentative links with the church through family and friends and did attend church occasionally. Others had cut all ties and a few had in fact moved to a different church. The following is a descriptive analysis of the responses.

Questionnaire

The twelve survey questions, and the Informed Consent details, are shown in appendix E and F. The questions were as follows:

1. How long did you attend church regularly?
2. Who did you used to attend church with: (a) family, (b) friends, (c) by yourself?
3. What did you like about church?
4. What did you dislike about church?
5. Were you: (a) dedicated as a child, (b) baptized as a child?
6. At what age did you stop attending?

7. Why did you stop attending church?

8. Many young people don't go to church. Please consider the list of possible reasons, tick those you consider appropriate, and prioritize your responses by ranking the most important from 1-10 (1 being the most important). Please feel free to add any other reasons.

Adult members living phony lives

The church places too much emphasis on non-essentials

Attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring

Church leaders are pre-occupied with organization, not concerned with people

Worship services are dull and meaningless

Do not have any real friends at church

Church does not allow me to think for myself

Other

9. Do you still have friends or family in the church? Yes/No

10. Do you think you may come back to church again one day? Yes/No. What would encourage you to return?

11. Do you think Christianity is still relevant to you? Yes/No. Please explain further.

12. Personal Information: Age/Gender

As the last question on the survey, question twelve, supplied the demographic details of the group it will be dealt with first.

Q. 12. Personal Information: Age/Gender.

Of the 22 forms received, 16 responses (73%) were from females and 6 responses (27%) were from males. Their ages ranged from 4 still in their teens, 12 in their 20s, 4 in their 30s and 2 in the 40 age bracket. The average age of the sample group was 26.6 years.

As previously mentioned all those surveyed had been indicated by the local church as being inactive. I understood this to mean that they had been non-attending for a significant period and this included the teens in the survey. A further question emerged as to whether they felt they had left church and this is really open to personal reflection. A few felt they still had ties with the church as they would attend occasionally. Where youngsters are not baptized this is a particularly grey area and reflects a silent group who are never recorded in most church statistics.

I feel it is significant that more females returned surveys given that from the final list of 55 names, 29 (53%) were male and 26 (47%) were female. Also as previously noted girls responded more readily to cold survey forms than their male counterparts. It is an observable fact that there are more females in the church so it may well be that we lose more males and correspondingly find it more difficult to reclaim them.

Whereas the issue of male spirituality is not the focus of this study, it is notable that this same issue has recently been the front cover article in *Ministry* magazine⁵ and was also highlighted in the findings of the European Valuegenesis survey. We will return to the issue of male and female spirituality in chapter six.

Q1. How long did you attend church regularly?

⁵*Ministry*, February 2008.

Reverting to the beginning of the survey, question one asked for information regarding how long they had attended church regularly. This was linked to question six which asked at what age they had stopped attending church. Eighteen of the group attended between the ages of eleven and twenty-five. At the bottom end, only three attended for less than ten years and one at the top end for more than thirty years. The reason for the three attending for only a short period during their childhood was because they belonged to one family (sisters) and their parents had moved away from the immediate area during their early years. There was not an Adventist church nearby so they had attended another denomination since that time.

Q6. At what age did you stop attending?

As mentioned above this question was linked to question one and therefore is addressed at this time as it gave further important information. Here it can be seen that four stopped attending church before the age of 10, three others before age 15, ten more before age 20, an additional two before age 25 and finally two in their 30s. It can, therefore, be readily seen that the peak years of attrition are the teenage years, especially between ages 15 and 20. The individual reasons for this were given in response to a further open-ended question. Underlying this is the recognizable fact that during these years young people make their own choices about attending and become, in one sense, masters of their own destiny. This is part of the teenage drive for independence which sometimes leads to the rejection of parental values, including church attendance.⁶

It must be stated at this point that each person who responded to the survey had a unique story to tell. They were definitely not merely statistics but rather real young

⁶Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, 213.

people who, for one reason or another, had disconnected with the church. It was observable that one or two did still attend occasionally and one was definite in responding that although their attendance was sporadic they had not left the church. We will look further at this with respect to their views on remaining Christian and perhaps one day returning to the church.

Q2. Who did you used to attend church with?

Three options were available, namely with family, friends, or by yourself. As would be expected all twenty-two answered that they attended with family although five also listed friends. Although not an unexpected response this clearly shows the strong family link that exists and without a doubt one clear need is to partner with families by providing resources and support as they bring up their children. This is especially important as the children turn from their childhood into the in-between years and finally through the teenage, adolescent years.

The family link remains no matter what the circumstances and there is no doubt that much fervent prayer is spoken for countless young people throughout the years, only Heaven will know the impact of these fervent prayers.

Q3. What did you like about church?

Both this question and the next allowed for complete free expression. In evaluating the answers friendship, or being with friends, came up as a significant common theme in the positive evaluation. It was clear that this is the number one positive factor for the sample group.

Other terms that were used included a sense of community or being part of a church family. As such there is a very clear indication that young people relate their enjoyment of church through the eyes of positive relationships.

A secondary theme was the importance of Sabbath School and one particular significant teacher was mentioned more than once. Sabbath School for children has always been an important aspect of church life. Often the difficulty is making the transitions from the junior to the senior classes. The fact that a particular teacher was mentioned⁷ is interesting as it shows the importance of such significant people in the lives of young people and even youth.

Other aspects that were only mentioned once included the activities for young people in the church, socializing with others of the same age, and sermons with good analogies.

Q4. What did you dislike about church?

Equally a predominant theme occurred in the list of dislikes. This came through in various comments about critical or narrow-minded church members. Somehow, a significant amount of our youth do not see the church as a warm and loving place to be. Others framed this on a corporate rather than a personal level and mentioned church politics, the perceived do's and don'ts they encountered as well as narrow-minded views of the church towards other minority groups such as homosexuals.

I had expected to hear that the services were perceived as boring and old fashioned and this was indeed mentioned. We will reflect further on this in response to

⁷The Sabbath School teacher mentioned is a grandmother known as Nanny Wynne.

the stated reasons as given in question number eight where we will see further sub-themes emerge.

Factors mentioned just once included a lack of friends at Sabbath School, a growing disagreement with some of the teaching, and one young lady reflected back that she did not know where the church fitted into the wider Christian community. There were definite overtones of an identity issue for the young person—where she saw the church fitting in personally and being relevant in a wider context.

Q5. Were you (please tick) Dedicated as a child; Baptized as a child?

Sixteen of the group were definite that they had been dedicated as a child, one did not know, one gave no answer and only four said they had not been. From this it is clear that over two-thirds had been dedicated by their parents in the church.

A different picture was found, however, concerning baptism. Only eight, or just over one-third of the group responded that they had been baptized. This shows an apparent disconnect between dedication, which is the choice of parents, and baptism which is the choice of youth themselves. Perhaps this is not surprising as this group no longer attended but bearing in mind that, as we have already seen, many had remained into their mid or later teenage years it is a significant observable fact.

Q7. Why did you stop attending church?

This was another open-ended question. Each person is different so the answers reflected a variety of reasons. Four or five had moved away from the area and no longer attended the local church, while another had gone on to university and had found it hard to find another church—he was also honest enough to say that it did not feel so important

to him at the time. Others indicated a personal conflict, a growing disagreement with some of the teachings, or referred back to the boring or old-fashioned services.

Q8. Many young people don't go to church. Please consider the list of possible reasons below, tick and prioritize those you consider important and add any other?

This question was more specific and listed a number of reasons, asking the respondents to rank these in order of importance. These reasons were the same ones as used in the Australian Valuegenesis survey⁸ and as such allowed scope for some comparison.

From my research I have noted in the figure below the top six reasons that had the most first, second, or third place rankings. The first three being: attitude of older members being critical and uncaring; worship services are dull and meaningless, and do not want to be a hypocrite.

⁸The Australian Valuenesis survey was carried out in the early 1990s.

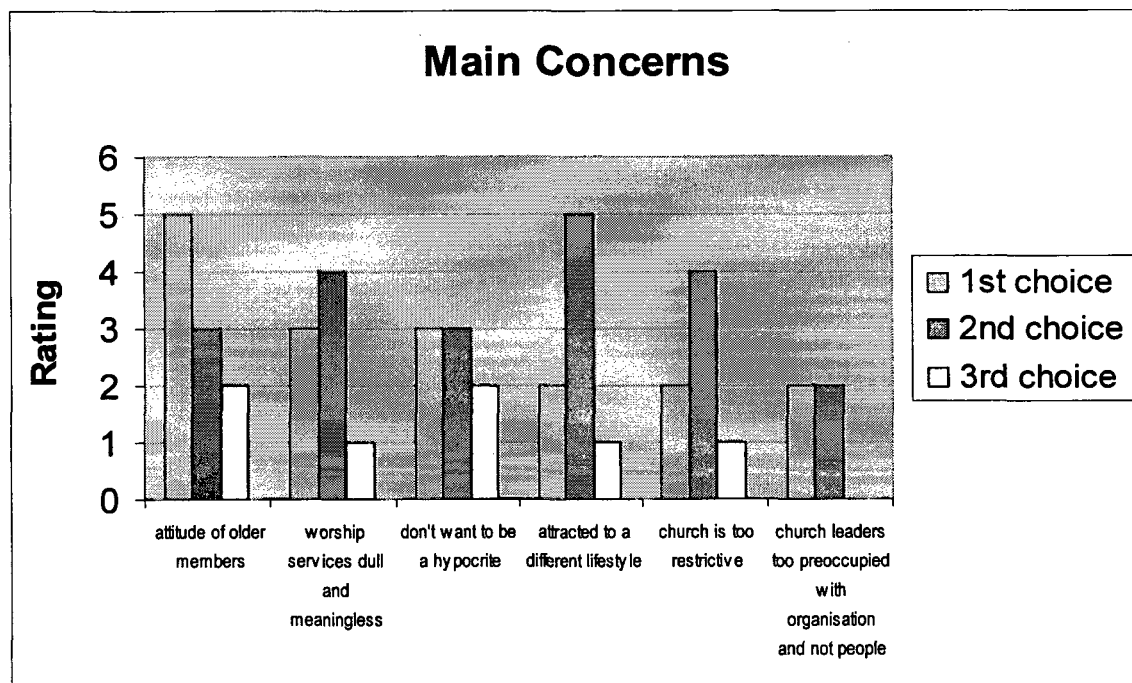


Figure 1: Main Concerns

Interestingly if a points-based scale⁹ was used, with each response awarded a certain number of points, the order remains the same except that the fourth reason, attracted to a different lifestyle, actually scores the same number of points as the third placed issue (don't want to be a hypocrite).

It is my personal belief that this is helpful as the issue of being attracted to a different lifestyle seems particularly significant. The attraction to a different lifestyle is a very real issue and is indicated by the fact that this gained the highest number of second placed scores. It may be age related and indeed is a key factor for some in their teenage

⁹Figure 1. Main Concerns. A points-based scale could give 6 points for every first answer, 5 points for every second answer and 4 points for every third answer. This weighting would give more value to second and third placed answers as opposed to merely ranking according to the number of first placed answers.

years. In my opinion, it is a significant factor related to 21st century youth culture.

It is very important to note that the attitude of older members gained the highest overall ranking, which confirms the impression given by the open-ended answers. As mentioned above, by using a points-based ranking three other reasons are almost equally reflected in the responses. Worship services are dull and meaningless, do not want to be a hypocrite, and being attracted to a different lifestyle.

As mentioned in relation to question four I expected worship services to feature. One person wrote that flexibility in the time of services might meet her lifestyle needs, mentioning afternoon services instead of morning services.

I also expected a significant response relating to hypocrisy. Not only is this a personal statement but the “H” word is one that I have often heard used in relation to teenagers perception of some adult church members, as will be commented on further below in relation to being perceived as living phony lives.

In the Australian Valuegenesis study the reasons were expressed in a different order. The first three being: adult members are living phony lives, the church places too much emphasis on non-essentials, and attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring.

The issue of adult members living phony lives is perhaps seen in Britain as the same as being a hypocrite. As not wishing to be a hypocrite was the third highest reason in my personal study I feel it can be seen that this is a principal that rates high in both areas but perhaps seen from different angles.

It should be noted that the other differences may be as a result of a number of variables, including the fact that the surveys were conducted on two different continents

and with a ten-year gap between them. In addition, there is the fact that a slightly different age group was being surveyed, with my study including people from their teens, twenties, thirties, and forties, whereas, the Australian survey was mainly conducted among a high school age group.

Looking more closely at age-related answers the main notable observation was concerning the relational issue that appeared in the top three in both lists. All the recipients in my study who had indicated as their top score, "Attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring," were either in their teens or twenties. This would seem to indicate that this perception is more keenly felt at a lower age.

This does not give the whole explanation, however, as it could also be seen that those in their thirties and forties still recorded second and third place scorings against this item. One of the most disturbing facts from this survey is that older church members are too often perceived as critical and uncaring by our youth.

Q9. Do you still have friends and family in the church?

This question was set to find out what contact systems were still in existence, asking whether they still had family and friends in the church. All twenty-two responded that they had family members still in the church and fifteen of the group had friends still attending. This is a powerful network group that surely holds the key to any eventual re-connection with the church.

While it is recognized that during adolescence a change often takes place and some teenagers may pull away from the value system of parents, in search for independence¹⁰ the family connection still remains. It may take a back seat for a time but

¹⁰Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*, 213.

from personal observation it is not uncommon to see grandparents bringing grandchildren to church even when the parents do not attend. Supporting and resourcing the family is one of the key elements of any successful approach to missing youth.

Q10. Do you think you may come back to church again one day? If Yes, what would encourage you to return?

Question 10 was a key question in the survey. Out of the group ten answered yes they thought they would return—with another two indicating they were unsure. Eight responded no and two others left the question blank—perhaps because they still sporadically attend and therefore do not consider that they have cut all ties.

These figures alone give great cause for hope. With nearly 50 percent saying outright that they would like to return one day, it is imperative to implement a systemic and meaningful reclamation ministry. If these figures were replicated on a national or international scale the boost to the church would be enormous.

The age of the respondents did not seem to be a contributing factor when answering the question. In all age groups, respondents answered Yes and No. While most had stopped attending in their teens or twenties their future intentions did not seem to be age related.

The focus groups felt, however, that there may be significant times or life stages when this may happen, such as marriage or birth of a child so that the infant can attend Sabbath school. For others it may take a downturn in their life or even a time of crisis to trigger the return. If this is correct then personal circumstance rather than chronological age may be part of the determining factors.

With this in mind the second part of the question was open ended and asked what they thought might encourage them to return? There were many and varied responses with one noting that they wanted to come back but family commitments were holding them back. Others reflected on the reasons they had left and looked for changes being made by the church. Some looked more introspectively at their own lives. A few found another church fellowship that they were happy with. This seemed to have happened more readily for the three sisters who left with their parents when they were very young. A few others responded with the view that they had moved on and, at this time at least, were not looking to return.

This question was formulated to help make the respondents think about their future intentions, and as such, no immediate action was anticipated. Only time will tell whether this group will ultimately return to the church or not. One who answered “Yes” wrote underneath, “although not necessarily regularly and not necessarily an Adventist church.” Another noted, “That’s not a Yes or No answer—that’s a maybe, depending on many things.” He went on to write at length about what would encourage him to return citing, “An excellent pastor with a keen interest in young people,” and “someone who is not just a pastor, but a friend.” Finally he concluded, “my departure from the church was a gradual one, if there is going to be a return it’ll also be a gradual one.”

Q11. Do you think Christianity is still relevant to you?

The question on returning to church was deliberately followed up by the penultimate question in the survey that simply asked whether they thought Christianity was still relevant to them. The options were for a yes/no answer with space to explain further. Here twenty-one out of twenty-two responded yes, with the one exception

writing at length explaining that he now believed in social action and meeting the needs of the suffering—all Christian values.

The point here is that whereas only fifty percent felt they would return to church, virtually one hundred percent were answering that they had not left God out of the equation. Christianity was most definitely seen as still being relevant but not necessarily equated in terms of church attendance. One wrote, “It has provided a base for life, something and someone to lean on in times of worry?” Another said, “I am still a Christian I just don’t believe in all SDA teachings or attend church regularly.” Yet another responded, “I still believe in Jesus as a personal saviour. I just feel distant and have no real desire to attend church or have a relationship with him at this time.”

The challenge for the church remains to keep positive contacts alive so that if and when some do wish to return, this can both be encouraged and welcomed. We need this group to meet the father of the parable of the prodigal son and not the older brother!

The unspoken question is what will they return to when they do return from their far country experience? We tend to assume that it would be back to church, but this may not necessarily be to the church that they left, or even in the form that they once attended. What actually constitutes returning is a far reaching question and to begin with, it may be to some half-way house or neutral setting. With this in mind there may be the need for modern day churches of refuge, just as cities of refuge were set up in Old testament times (Deut 19). We will look at this concept further in the next chapter as well as examining issues surrounding the re-emerging church in the last chapter.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the surveys revealed a number of interesting facts about the group who responded. The following are ten main points that emerged.

1. Females seem more responsive than males to cold contact, but males will respond once a real and warm link can be established.

2. In their early years, friends remain the top reason why young people enjoy attending church.

3. The early, mid, and late teenage years are the focal point when youth make decisions for or against continuing church fellowship. The peak age bracket for becoming inactive was between ages fifteen and twenty.

4. There exists a continuing contact system through the family. This usually remains intact even when a young person has left church fellowship.

5. The church is not seen as warm and caring and youth often see church members as being critical and narrow minded. The attitude of older members was expressed as the top area of dislike felt about the church.

6. There exists a disconnect between dedicating young children and baptism. Only a third of the group were baptized. We are clearly not effectively discipling enough of our own young people while they are actively with us in the church.

7. Some young people may be very sporadic in their church attendance but do not consider that they have cut all ties with the church. Church attendance does not seem to be a major priority for some during their early twenties or period of tertiary education.

8. Virtually half of the group felt they would return to church one day. Whether this is a wish that will be translated into action remains to be seen, but it provides hope that all is certainly not lost.

9. Overwhelmingly the young people surveyed showed that they still felt that Christianity was still relevant to their lives.

10. Each young person is unique and has their own story to tell. We must never treat them as merely statistics.

Each of these points is significant and will need to be kept in mind as we formulate a plan to help our youth both keep and share their faith. It is clear that there is no easy formula to solve the problem, but principles learned from previous research, and allied to the above findings, will shape the ongoing response to the problem.

CHAPTER V

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RECLAIMING YOUTH IN THE TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

“There is something interesting happening in the Christian community across the Western world. Very unobtrusively, one group of believers is growing on a daily basis. Soon the numbers will be such that they can’t be ignored. Who are they? They’re the Christians who don’t go to church anymore.”¹ The important question that begs an answer is what must the church do about it?

This is the question I wish to address in this chapter. The research carried out in my local church highlighted that youth had certainly left the church, but also that Christianity is still very important to them. As noted all had links to the church through their family and fifty percent felt they may return at some time in the future.

The good news is that the church is beginning to do something about it. I will begin by noting the General Conference Youth Department Strategic Themes 2006-2010 and also recent references made by the General Conference president. Following this I wish to build a platform for reclamation based on a model of refuge—taken from the biblical provision for cities of refuge—with a systems approach to an integrated family ministry that will be an integral part of the outworking of this reclamation ministry.

¹M. Riddell, M. Pierson, and C. Kirkpatrick, *The Prodigal Project* (London: SPCK, 2000), 1.

Together these elements will help formulate a Strategic Plan for the Trans-European Division.

2006 General Conference Youth Advisory Strategic Themes

At the 2006 GC Youth Advisory seven strategic themes for youth ministry were outlined, each with a number of further emphases. The third strategic theme, Reclaiming, is shown in appendix G and had the following introduction:

The General Conference Youth Ministries Department firmly believes in the need of facing the challenge of looking for and reclaiming the lost. We have always been attentive to and cared about young people that are born in families already in the church; but they are leaving the church like water through our fingers. The Gospel of Luke chapter 15 shows us how Christ, as the Good Shepherd, looks for His lost sheep until it is found, while leaving the other 99 in a safe place. As youth pastors we must imitate this example.²

Break-out groups were organized to work on the practical points of emphasis. As break-out group leader for this strategic theme I was involved in identifying eight points of emphasis to elaborate, how this can be achieved.³ This Strategic Theme is included in appendix C and highlights some practical steps for contacting and reaching out to inactive members. This includes the local church having a re-encounter program over a sustained period.

The important points are that as a church we are becoming intentional about reclamation and also that it is recognized these points of emphasis are only effective at a local level where church and family unite in partnership. As such a local church-based plan for reclamation can be adopted and replicated in any country.

²“Strategic Themes 2005-2010,” General Conference Youth Ministries Advisory, Hagerstown, MD, March 3-5, 2006.

³Ibid.

The last point of emphasis in the GC strategic themes deals with the need to help returning young people assimilate by linking them, if possible, with a small youth group. It is this concept that I wish to focus on in examining a model of refuge for our young people—a model where young people are uniquely involved.

The concept of young people taking responsibility for the care of their peers in their local church has recently been advanced by the General Conference President, Jan Paulsen. In an October 2008 article in *Adventist World*, he reflected back on the responses from his Let's Talk meetings with young people. Here he made the following statement, "Young people are also frustrated by the sheer numbers of their peers who are leaving the church. This concern came up again and again."⁴ He then went on to posit a solution, "Young people should be commissioned to take greater responsibility for ministry to their peers. This is a task for which they are uniquely equipped. Let it be a defined, recognized ministry within the local church, like Sabbath school, or being a deacon or elder. Let's provide young people with official space, a territory of trust."⁵

The issue of young people being commissioned for greater responsibility will be referred to again in the recommendations from this paper, but at this stage I would like to focus further on the subject of official space and a territory of trust. This will be specifically addressed from the standpoint of creating a strategic plan for the Trans-European Division that encompasses a model of care and refuge for our young people.

It is quite clear from the pilot study, highlighted in the last chapter, that relational issues are very important to young people. They want the church to be warm and caring

⁴Jan Paulsen, "Looking Back at Let's Talk," *Adventist World*, October 2008, 10.

⁵Ibid.

and as such in looking to answer the question of what can we do about young people leaving the church I specifically wish to look at creating youth friendly churches. The next section will look at this in some detail under the heading Churches of Refuge, noting that a church of refuge will be a place where care for young people is both intentional and paramount.

Churches of Refuge

As previously mentioned, I firmly believe that the most effective youth ministry is carried out at the local level. It is there where the young person worships week in and week out and it is there that partnerships between the church and family can effectively work. The local church is undoubtedly where young people experience the vitally important caring and welcoming environment.

We must never see “church” as a corporate exercise or become lost in institutionalism. The fact that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a well-defined structure—from the General Conference, through Divisions, Unions and Conferences and down to the local church—is a great strength. This strength, however, can become a weakness if ideas and initiatives get stuck in the chain or if the process is always from the top down. Grass roots ownership is vital at the local church level.

Effective Youth Ministry

Each local church, irrespective of size, needs a functioning and effective youth ministry. It is imperative that each church makes provision for young people by assigning a youth leader and a mechanism to provide for the care, nurture, and support of its youth.

At all church levels there is undoubtedly a place for memory building events such as camps, youth congresses, mission trips and other service type projects but these should be seen as the icing on the cake rather than the main course. The reason for this is that the focal point of ministry takes place in a local church among family groups. Youth ministry is not an island unto itself.

To make the points of emphasis effective under the GC Strategic Theme 3 (Reclaiming) we need, therefore, to also look further at the church. There has been some emphasis of late on child or youth friendly churches. Such churches would certainly have an active youth ministry that provided for children teens and youth. The exact nature of the programs offered will depend from church to church on the number of youth and the age group concerned.

Youth friendly churches also need to provide a ministry to the youth who are inactive and may one day look to return. A recent book by Jeff Lucas entitled *Creating A Prodigal Friendly Church*⁶ looks at how to reach those who have already gone and also how to help those who return feel like they belong again. The important observation is made that “we urgently need prodigal-friendly churches for but one reason; prodigals matter.”⁷ It is also true that “those who cry for prodigals matter”⁸ too and the church has a role in meeting the needs of both groups.

The emphasis of youth friendly churches makes sure that youth are a priority in

⁶Jeff Lucas, *Creating a Prodigal Friendly Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

⁷Ibid., 15.

⁸Ibid.

action and not merely in words. They will include the inactive youth who must remain a vitally important part of the church family. This will require looking further at a family-based youth ministry that operates within the church of refuge model.

A Biblical Model

Each quinquennium a departmental advisory is scheduled and in October 2007 the TED Youth Advisory was held near Oslo, Norway. As TED Youth Director I had specifically scheduled a breakout session in which the TED youth directors could begin to further explore the concept of retention and reclamation. In private discussion with one of our guest lecturers, Ron Whitehead, a biblical base for a place of safe haven emerged.

A compelling biblical passage from Deut 19 was intentionally studied by one of the break-out groups. When the Israelites occupied the Promised Land, God specifically instructed that cities of refuge should be established where people could flee in times of need. In context this was expressly to save their lives when they may have accidentally killed someone.

Biblical and Historical Background to Cities of Refuge

Cities of Refuge were originally established in Israel to offer protection for those who had accidentally killed another human being. This idea of protection is also a key concept in creating a model for churches of refuge. There were also elements of mediation, justice, and long-term care as they would stay in the city for an extended period, in some cases until the death of the High Priest.⁹

⁹*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (2006), s.v. "Cities of Refuge."

Biblical references can be found in Num 35:9-15; Deut 4:41-43; 19:1-3; and Josh 20:8-9. “The six cities designated in Josh 20:8-9, three in the Transjordan and three in Cisjordan, were strategically located so that none lay outside a day’s journey from any point in Israel.”¹⁰ The aspect of strategic location is also very pertinent to a church of refuge.

Initially, Deuteronomy records that three such cities were established “in the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess” (Deut 19:2). Later another three cities were to be added as their borders were enlarged and because “you carefully follow all these laws I command you today—to love the Lord your God and to walk always in his ways” (Deut 19:9). The idea of developing more cities of refuge as the borders were enlarged is also readily transferable to today. This concept of a strategically placed safe refuge, where youth can flee to for protection, certainly paints an appealing picture both then and now.

Historically the church has always been seen as a place of refuge or sanctuary and needs to be seen as such again today. There was a right to be safe from arrest in the sanctuary of a church, “recognized by English law from the fourth to the seventeenth Century.”¹¹ There are both historical and modern examples where this refuge or sanctuary was defiled with disastrous results. The record of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, being killed in Canterbury Cathedral in December 1170 remains one of the most famous stories associated with medieval England. After Becket fell out with

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Wikipedia, “Sanctuary,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary> (accessed February 3, 2009).

King Henry II he was killed by knights in the sanctuary of his own Cathedral and later the spot where he died became a place of pilgrimage.

Looking at a more modern example during the terrible tragedy that befell Rwanda in 1994 where an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus died, many people fled to the church for safety but were burned alive. The tragedy was that the city of refuge principal was not honored.

Sadly the church was also complicit in some of this tragedy. "Not only were Christian members of the congregations of every single denomination in Rwanda responsible for the most appalling atrocities, but many massacres took place in the parishes where the targets of the genocide had sought sanctuary."¹²

Lately the idea of the church being a place of refuge has taken hold again in a slightly different form. A Church of England report, entitled *A Place of Refuge*, was commissioned to counter the popular prejudice and misinformation about asylum seekers and refugees during the run up to a recent general election. "*A Place of Refuge* proposes a series of actions, including: providing welcome, friendship and support; acting to dispel harmful untruths; opposing racist attitudes; and recognising the contribution of asylum seekers."¹³

A Continuing Process. The TED group of youth directors became excited by the prospect of churches meeting the same need for today's youth. With this in mind the

¹²Rainer Chr. Hennig, "The Cross and the Genocide," Afrol News, <http://www.afrol.com/features/10600> (accessed February 3, 2009).

¹³The Church of England, "Church offers a place of refuge," <http://www.cofe.org.uk/info/yearreview/may05/coapor.html> (accessed February 3, 2009).

group began to work further on what could be the possible criteria for such a church of refuge.

The first point to note is that a Church of Refuge would aim to both attract and hold members. In attracting members this would include reaching out to both returning young adults as well as new young people. The corollary is the desire to hold them, showing the need to approach both reclamation and retention together.

Could this church really exist in any meaningful way? In addition, how could this be brought about and what would it ultimately look like? To answer these questions a small group of Youth Directors and myself began to take part in a series of ongoing discussions that took place during 2008.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the same actions that the Church of England report focused on, namely welcome, friendship, and support, became quite independently the focus of the criteria and action steps that the group arrived at and which we will later look at in the TED Strategic Plan.

In seeking to further answer the question—what would such a church of refuge look like today?—I wish to briefly examine a systems theory of church management in relation to working with families and young people.

A Systems Approach

Any church is made up of a congregation with families and children at its heart. A church of refuge will be no different. The church-based youth ministry mentioned above will, therefore, be a family-based youth model. I would first like to look at it based

¹⁴A series of small group meetings took place in 2008 to discuss the Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan. These were held at London Stansted airport (February), Munich (April), and Amsterdam Schiphol airport (May).

on a systems approach. “Implementing a family-based youth ministry requires a systems approach, thinking beyond the specific needs of teenagers and considering the patterns within families that influence youth along with the patterns within the culture that influence families.”¹⁵ This includes the need to look at input systems, a transforming system, and also output systems.

Basically, “the church, like all other systems, in order to survive and carry on its activities must take in raw materials from its environment—new people, money, hired personnel, new technologies and methods, materials and so on.”¹⁶ This is the input system that a church of refuge must look to and seek to transform

In like manner “the transforming process of a church is the totality of the means by which the church transforms its raw materials—people, money, technologies, and so forth—into its desired results—conversions, spirituality, social services, trained lay workers.”¹⁷ It is the process of transforming returning inactive members or prodigals that will be at the very heart of the mission of a church of refuge.

Specifically a Church of refuge will need to examine how it can provide transitions for returning inactive members in order that the transforming process can begin. This may start with detached youth workers¹⁸ who specifically reach out to the

¹⁵Jeff Lucas, *Will Your Prodigal Come Home?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 181.

¹⁶Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck, *Management for Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1977), 35.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸A Detached Youth worker would work primarily away from the church base, meeting youth where they live, socialize, or work.

inactive where they are, rather than working internally as is usually the case in existing churches.

Such detached youth workers can help to establish bridges back to church. They should work with families utilizing the family-based youth ministry network model referred to later in this chapter. It will also require a flexible approach that may include a small group or social network and in fact a Church of refuge may even begin this way.

This leads us to look at the output system. The ultimate output is re-energized and committed young people. This cannot happen overnight and by necessity will be part of a process. This process will include an active family-based youth ministry operating within a church of refuge and providing transition points such as small groups—even strugglers groups as we will later note—or other such like welcoming, friendly, and supportive mechanisms.

A church of refuge must be intentional about reaching out to its families and especially transforming inactive members. This is the intention of the General Conference Strategic Theme 3 outlined above. The link will be the families and as such we must now look at family-based youth ministry in more detail.

Family-Based Youth Ministry

The model of youth ministry that I personally find most convincing, and one which I feel is eminently suitable to the Church of refuge concept, is one where the congregation provides resources for the parents who in turn are the center of the ministry towards their children. The church does not stop providing for youth, and still holds significant memory building events, but its first task is to provide resource support for parents.

This model is family-based youth ministry. “Family-based youth ministry accesses the incomparable power of the nuclear family whilst also connecting students to an extended family of Christian adults. By working in partnership the outcome is students who grow towards maturity in Christ.”¹⁹

Family-based youth ministry is valuable for both retention and reclamation. Working with families and resourcing them at different age stages of their children’s development is vital in the retention process. Additionally, my survey has shown that even when young people have become inactive they still have family back at church who are their closest link with the church of their youth. For this reason family-based youth ministry will have a significant role to play in a Church of refuge.

A pictorial model of such a ministry is shown in appendix H. The model places children at the heart with families and then the congregation surrounding them and providing both love and support. In turn the congregation and families support each other as the agencies nearest to the children and youth.

The family-based youth ministry program will take time to develop and there is no one prototype in existence that fits all. It will take time to develop the networks and synergy needed to get the different groups working together. Neither is it a sticking plaster²⁰ approach, but rather a partnership of all those who have the best interests of individual youth at heart.

¹⁹M. DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 176.

²⁰A sticking plaster is an English term for a Band Aid.

A Partnership of Family and Friends

It is the partnership element that I find crucial. As noted the research in the previous chapter showed that all the young people interviewed still had family involved in the church. Undoubtedly, the first point of contact for the 50 percent who indicated that they would like to come back to church one day will be family and friends. In this light I reiterate my belief that family-based youth ministry can also be a very effective tool in the scenario of reaching out to inactive youth.

This was highlighted in a case study by Jeff Lucas who has taken the prodigal project to America. In his book, *Will Your Prodigal Come Home?* He highlights the case of Craig, a pastor's son, who leaves the church and falls into the drug scene. The book graphically shows the torment of his parents during many turbulent years but very interestingly the last chapter is written by Craig as he finally struggles to break free and come home from his far country experience.

On looking back at the journey home he notes how a former youth pastor helped him find a worship position in a church that he was now pastoring as well as recognizing the constant input of his parents. "Looking back I'm so grateful that through those dark years my parents listened, loved, watched and talked. I know that they still pray for me daily."²¹ This case is not in isolation and I know of many other Christian parents who do likewise.

On a very practical basis I would like to see a local church approach a family-based youth ministry by initiating a comprehensive visitation program of families on the church membership record. This would include the pastoral team visiting the parents at

²¹Lucas, *Will Your Prodigal Come Home?* 179.

the start of a year and specifically asking what the church could do to aid them in the coming twelve months with regards to the spiritual development of their children.

This would allow for the recognition of particular transition periods, such as when children move from one Sabbath School division to another and also from Junior to Secondary school. It would also take cognizance of key ages such as 14-15 and 17-18 where extra support and mentoring may be important as youngsters often experiment at this time of life and spirituality graphs often dip at these points.²² The recognition of partnering with and resourcing parents at the varying developmental age stages is included in the first criteria of the TED Strategic Plan as outlined later in this chapter.

This approach would also keep the church in constant touch with both the family and the youth themselves. The next step would depend upon the individual situation but would allow for a joint plan of action to be agreed. By so doing it would create partnership in action. Working with youth does not take place in isolation. Families belong in the life of their church and the church belongs in the lives of both the families and their growing youth. I believe that family-based youth ministry provides this vital and often missing link between the church and family.

Such an approach can be instituted in existing churches as well as new church plants. “Ordinarily, attempting to implement a totally family-based youth ministry only works in entirely new ministries or in ministries that are begging for a wholesale change in their approach to ministry with teenagers. For the vast majority of churches a slow implementation process makes the most sense.”²³ The implementation method will

²²Brierley, *Reaching and Keeping Teenagers*, 239, 240.

²³DeVries, 182.

therefore slightly vary from church to church but I believe the concept is well suited to a church of refuge approach.

The intentionality remains to help young people return home. Most people I know carry a burden for someone who has left their spiritual home and many feel the pain of empty pews beside them. They long for their loved one to return but often fear what would happen if they did.

Returning Home

As noted from the pilot study research nearly fifty percent of the research group indicated that they would like to return sometime in the future. Also, it was clear that most had been attending church for many years, two-thirds had been dedicated as children and one-third baptized. This means that most were well grounded in Christianity and as we noted twenty-one out of the twenty-two respondents still saw themselves as such now. A significant question is what do we expect them to return to?

The truth is that sometimes they may find the prospect of returning to their own church rather daunting. "If a person has been inactive for a while realize that to get involved again requires battling a number of fears."²⁴ These fears include acceptance, especially where non-Adventist lifestyles have been adopted, the resulting fear of behavioral change and perhaps the fear of losing other friends. These are all real issues that must be taken seriously.

For this reason a stepped strategy with built in transitions will be needed. In his book *Bringing Home the Prodigals* Rob Parsons refers to a weekly home group they set

²⁴A. Barry Gane, "Reclaiming Our Youth," *Youth Ministry Accent*, January-March 2006, 21.

up called “The Strugglers Group.”²⁵ He made the point that whatever background they came from and despite their different experiences, all were looking for a safe haven at least in the short term. This is one of the transition points referred to earlier. It was also recognized that there may be other mechanisms that will also provide the necessary welcoming and caring environment

This safe haven may even begin without attending any physical venue. Today meeting one another is possible on-line through joining “Friends Reunited” or through social networking web-sites such “Facebook” and “My Space.” These provide the means for many former church members to remain in contact. As such the journey home may begin in cyber space before ever coming to a physical building. Relationships remain the key factor.

A church, however, can still be that safe haven, or place of refuge, although perhaps not always in the original form. There is certainly a need for churches to be intentional about becoming places of refuge and small groups or internet contacts may form a type of half-way house.

It may be a big step to go beyond this but there is definitely a place for a church to meet the needs of those who are in the process of having their relationships rebuilt. There is still a need for people to find somewhere where they feel both emotionally and physically at home.

The fact is that many of our youth do not see the church as being warm and friendly and may wonder if it will be any different on their return. Prodigal or youth

²⁵Parsons, 97.

friendly churches would be ones that are dedicated to accepting people for who they are and not what they may look like and also who have made some preparation in advance.

On a practical level one veteran youth worker I know stresses the need for every church that has its own building to have a separate room for young people. This would provide a space where they can hang out and call their own. This again has a dual role—first in retention but second as a transition point as part of the reclamation process.

Each church would need to assess the age range of their youth and adapt the concept as necessary. It may work best with younger youth as a place where they can go for general classes, socials, and youth clubs held in this setting. In many ways this is like a club room of old but in today's culture it would probably be far less formal—a room that can be decorated and maintained to their own taste.

Looking further at this in the light of reclamation such a room could also be used as a half-way house that attracts inactive members or returning prodigals. As such it is a step along a continuum that may later lead to full church attendance. I was personally involved with an innovative youth outreach program called Altered Endings, where the church allowed a downstairs hall to not only be decorated but to have a stage installed and a soft drinks bar. Other churches have also adopted similar approaches to create warm and welcoming youth rooms.

Sometimes youth rooms fall into disuse after the initial group has passed on. This can also happen when a dynamic youth leader passes off the scene and is replaced by another who has different priorities. It is still valid however, if they meet the need of the time and like other such initiatives this would need to be regularly reviewed.

The need, however, goes further than just a room. We recognized that family-based youth ministry needed a change of thinking and a new approach and I believe that this is also the case with youth friendly churches. It is important from the outset to be intentional about the base for such a church, otherwise it can be a nice sounding name but little more. By being intentional the church could lay the foundations for truly being a warm and caring environment where young people could feel accepted as they are and also a place where their questions can be answered in a non-threatening atmosphere.

Part of the process of being intentional led to the formation of the TED Strategic Plan which is outlined below. As already noted the journey to discover a plan for such place of refuge for youth began with a series of meetings involving the youth directors of the Trans-European Division and resulted in the following vision, criteria, and action steps. These criteria deal with aspects of retention and reclamation and reflect the duality already mentioned concerning these two inextricably linked aspects of ministry.

Strategic Plan

The strategic plan is shown in full in appendix I. It contains a vision statement, ten criteria, and accompanying action points and was presented to the TED Spring Meetings in May 2008.

Vision Statement

“A church of refuge is a church that is intentional about young people ensuring that young people feel protected, that they are valued and can get involved.”²⁶

²⁶TED Spring Meetings, St. Albans, England, May 2008.

Summary of Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan

The first three of the ten criteria focus on the need to unconditionally accept young people and to be intentional in assisting their faith development. This includes young people being involved in the development of the vision and communicating to young people what they can expect from the church as well as sharing the opportunities to be involved in the mission of the church.

Criteria four and five deal expressly with the church's intention to actively seek to contact young people moving into the vicinity and being committed to staying in contact with anyone who has taken a break from church fellowship. The accompanying action points for criteria five were specifically aimed at creating an extensive list of all inactive youth, contacting them with the aim of sensitively starting visiting, and holding a homecoming Sabbath as part of a three month re-encounter program. This stressed the importance of the points of emphasis in Strategic Theme 3 (Reclamation) from the GC plan.

The sixth criteria dealt with systematically praying for all of the young people. These criteria in particular met some of the main points highlighted by the focus groups as shown in chapter four.

The last criteria dealt with the practical issues of providing a youth elder, integrating young people into the leadership of the church, providing physical space for them, and having a substantial budget for their care and support.

It should be noted that from the very outset that a Church of refuge will encourage and resource parents (Action Step 1) and as such incorporates Family-based youth ministry at the very heart. Criteria five relates directly to reclamation and is specific as to

the steps that need to be taken. Section six deals with prayer and together these sections directly address the focus group aims of prayer and keeping in touch with inactive youth as outlined at the start of chapter four. Also criteria nine specifically deals with the youth space issue highlighted earlier.

A Church of refuge provides welcome, friendship, and support. It is designed as a transition point for returning young people, but will inevitably attract other young people who are on the fringes of the church or who feel the need for such care and protection. Reclamation and retention remain hand in glove as young people are guided through their spiritual life journey.

The reason for presenting the plan to the full Executive Committee was because the vision is not seen as only a youth department project but rather a fully fledged church issue. To facilitate this process it was presented as an agenda item with the resulting recommendations being duly recorded in the official TED minutes of the meetings.

The recommendations put to the TED Executive committee recognized that the Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan is a dynamic document. It would need a plan of action, some pilot projects, and specific training opportunities and details of these are outlined in full in the next chapter. Before passing on to these, however, it is important to note that a plan itself, as important as it is, is not the end of the matter. Individually and corporately we must have a heart for the inactive.

Creating a Heart for the Inactive

At this point it is important to raise an important caveat. As Jeff Lucas states, “Being prodigal-friendly is not about getting a logo of approval that states you are hereby ‘officially’ pronounced as church friendly to prodigals. Rather we must pray that God

will allow us to catch glimpses and hints of what it means to have his heart for those who have decided to walk away.”²⁷ In other words we must be careful not to create a quick fix scenario that resorts simply to focusing on achieving a kite mark, as good as that may be.

It is important to set the standard, to lay down the necessary criteria for being a church of refuge, and to making sure a church takes steps to review this annually. Of equal importance is to change the culture that may have been part of the problem in the first place. A church of refuge will be one that sets about “developing a heart for prodigals and looking to create a culture that is friendly towards them, one that might have prevented them from walking away in the first place.”²⁸

Another important realization is that a church of refuge will not come about simply because a leader decides that it should be so. It must be owned and developed as a grass roots initiative. To do this the members will need to embrace the new prodigal friendly culture and actively seek ways of making this a living reality in their church.

This will certainly need the church to take a long hard look at where it wishes to position itself both now and in the future with relation to caring for all of its youth. It must be intentional about creating a warm and friendly environment. Lip service is not enough. This will entail time, hard work, and an understanding that there is no place here for the elder brother syndrome.

The final realization is that “God wants his house back. He loves prodigals and all those who have been barred and excluded. The call to be prodigal friendly is really a

²⁷Lucas, *Creating a Prodigal Friendly Church*, 16.

²⁸Ibid.

call to be like God our heavenly father.”²⁹ There is no higher calling or mandate than this.

²⁹Ibid., 166.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan was presented to the Trans-European Division Spring Executive Meetings with three clear recommendations. 1. Record receipt of the churches of refuge document with the TED Youth department to further prepare a plan of action for developing the concept. 2. Aim to plant twenty-five church of refuge type churches—one refuge church per country—led by and for youth—where young people with challenges can be embraced and their immediate needs met. 3. Incorporate the churches of refuge criteria and action steps into the TED Relay training program.

In this chapter we will examine the implementation of these three recommendations, especially with respect to preparing a further plan of action, and also by including the church of refuge material as a core component in the new TED youth evangelism training program. An initial evaluation of the first pilot program of the Relay Institute will also be included, however, as organizing pilot churches of refuge is in the implementation stage it will not be possible to include a further analysis or evaluation of them at this time.

Additionally, the vitally important area of change will be examined, looking at the local church and youth ministry in a wider sphere. Change involves people and we will also look further at issues relating to male and female spirituality. Finally we will look to

building the future recognizing that there is a time for everything and that the time for action is now.

Plan of Action

The first recommendation from the TED Executive Committee vote concerned the production of a Plan of Action. Accordingly, I met again with the same small group of Youth Directors who had initially helped to develop the Strategic Plan to begin the process. It is important that any such plan can be readily useable at a local church level and so some test or pilot churches were planned. These would enable feedback and evaluation before the program was launched in full. The resulting plan contained the following steps:

1. Identify a pilot church of refuge (CORE) in each of the countries from where a youth director was present at the meetings (Britain, Holland, Norway). Each church to be given the ten point strategic plan document for discussion and feedback.
2. Request initial feedback from the pilot CORE churches as an immediate review.
3. Hold a further planning meeting to begin work on further resources—meeting scheduled for October 2008.
4. Commence pilot projects for a six month period (Jan-June 2009).
5. Review meeting to evaluate pilot projects (March 2009).
6. Launch the programme to a wider audience at the Pan-European Youth Congress (August 2009).
7. Hold a churches of refuge exchange where the pilot churches would meet together to share experiences and discuss progress (October/November 2009).

8. Hold a major TED-wide training programme early in 2010.

The above points addressed both items one and two from the Executive Committee vote, namely to prepare a plan of action, and also to plan for launching church of refuge type churches in each country. In so doing it was also decided to identify TED churches of refuge with the shortened version (COrE) as shown above.

Although only a small point this not only identifies the churches by the first letter of each word but also gives a further important wider dimension, that of being at the heart, or core, to the life of a young person attending the church. A website with a COrE logo would also be planned as part of the corporate identity for these churches.

The third recommendation from the Executive Committee was in respect to incorporating this concept into the TED Relay training program.

Training Program

The Relay Institute of Youth Evangelism is a new initiative in the TED. It has its roots in the initial findings from the Valuegenesis Europe youth survey where the need to train the core young people had been established. The resulting Institute of Youth Evangelism was constructed with a syllabus of three core modules and one elective taught over a period of 120 hours comprising a total of four weeks. This Institute was designed to be mobile and taken to each country throughout the Trans-European Division.

The core modules are: Foundations of Adventist Beliefs, Foundations of Discipleship and Leadership, and Foundations of Youth Outreach. Two pilot programs of the Institute were planned to commence in the autumn of 2008, in Hungary and Sweden. In both cases two modules would be presented in each location at this first

round of the program, with the other module and an elective course scheduled for the following year.

The Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan was specifically incorporated as a key part of the course descriptor for the module in Foundations of Youth Outreach and this module was first taught at Pecel, Hungary in August 2008. For the Swedish course the other two core modules were to be taught in the first year.

Prior to the training a planning meeting was held at the TED offices where coordinators from both countries and module presenters met to plan both the logistics and teaching elements of the courses to be taught. The full course descriptor is shown in appendix J but the following is given to show the aims of the module and what is taught as it includes both Family-based Youth Ministry and an introduction to the churches of refuge plan.

Foundation of Youth Outreach

This course aims to give the student the opportunity to discover their own evangelistic style and to be able to apply this in a practical setting. The students will also explore biblical models of outreach and develop a plan of action to combine and apply these models in the light of both their evangelistic style and as contextualized into 21st Century youth culture.

What Is Taught

A witnessing module including biblical principles and also giving practical expression to individual Christian experiences. This will include:

1. Looking at Youth and Evangelism from the following perspectives:

- a. The example and commands of Jesus
 - b. The teaching and practice of the Apostles
 - c. The counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy.
2. Reviewing in a group setting a student's own faith experience. Learning how to prepare their story and share it with others in a natural and non threatening manner.
3. Looking at principles of Saving Youth in the 21st Century (un-churched, churched, and "prodigal" youth).
4. A careful study of the TED Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan for youth reclamation and retention.
5. An exploration of Family-based Youth Ministry principles.

The stated aim of the Relay program is to make the training as practical as possible. At the start of the youth outreach module the participants were asked to do some informal research among the group to ascertain how many had grown up in the church as a result of biological growth and how many had joined the church from being previously un-churched or from another denomination. In Hungary, from the thirty-one who participated in this module, twenty-two (71%) were in the former category and nine (21%) in the latter.

Although from only one sample the same trend is likely to be replicated elsewhere. This clearly highlights the need to also focus on inside out¹ youth evangelism, as it cannot be assumed that all are converted just because they attend church. We will

¹Inside-out youth evangelism involves working first with youth within the church, and helping them to then reach out to their friends and neighbors. Whereas Outside-in youth evangelism is where a deliberate strategy is followed to work with un-churched youth and then hope to bring them into the church.

build up a continuing profile with respect to this in subsequent Relay programs planned for 2009 and beyond.

The group was also asked to prepare a list of people they had known who had grown up in the church but who no longer attended. Although not comprehensive a total of 135 names were immediately obtained from five sub groups consisting of the 31 young people. In writing their plans of action at the end of the module the participants were challenged to create impact lists, to pray for these young people together with other contacts, and to prepare both personal and group outreach projects.

Evaluation

At the end of the course an initial evaluation exercise was carried out. This was done by means of a simple questionnaire given to each of the participants. It is recognized that at this point the evaluation is limited to their initial reaction as to the effectiveness and relevance of the teaching module they had just experienced. A more in depth analysis will be needed at a later stage.

This initial evaluation covered both of the main modules taught in Hungary—the Foundations of Adventist Beliefs and Foundations of Youth Outreach modules. Each person could rank the daily sessions to be either, Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent. This included a line item in the evaluation for a churches of refuge presentation. The same system applied for the afternoon practical sessions.

The results from this section showed a high approval rate overall. By awarding the four options (Poor 1–Excellent 4) a mean average score could be gauged for each presentation from the 25 returned forms. Every average ranked above 3, ranging from 3.16 to 3.83.

Finally there were three open ended questions; “What was the best thing about Relay?”; “What was the weakest thing about Relay?” and “Any suggestions as to how Relay could serve you better?”

When the comments were translated and analyzed it was evident that the Relay program had been very well accepted. Some useful practical feedback was received from a participant’s viewpoint, with suggestions such as the need to be able to refresh what had been learned and a desire for further opportunities to plan together. A copy of the evaluation instrument and summary of the average scores is shown in appendix K.

The Relay course made a good introduction to the Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan. As will be highlighted in the final recommendations to this paper, however, it is recognized that more in depth training will be needed as the pilot projects are implemented.

Having completed the Relay course the planning team also met to review the evaluation and gain feedback from the presenter’s perspective. This same process of implementation and evaluation was planned for each subsequent course, both with the aim of monitoring effectiveness and also to make the adjustments and improvements as shown to be necessary.

A further more in-depth evaluation could occur at a five yearly interval when there will be a number of courses to analyze together. At this time it will also be possible to evaluate the pilot churches of refuge; established as part of the plan of action explained above, with the aim to analyze their practical effectiveness.

Such a program will inevitably bring about change and at this point it is important to recognize the need to evaluate change itself—especially in relation to the way change will effect the situation in both the local and national areas of the church.

For instance, to begin with we aim to start different types of churches of refuge, involving existing churches as well as new church plants or youth services. This will involve the need to look at the changes that are needed, both locally and nationally, for the ongoing success of the program.

The Need for Change

As indicated above, the plan of action for reclaiming youth in the TED—incorporating the new churches of refuge model—will certainly bring about some significant changes in the way we approach church. Put simply the emphasis will not just be on meeting the needs of the faithful but rather being intentional about developing churches where youth can feel comfortable to invite their friends.

In April 2008, the British Union president, Pastor Don McFarlane, said, “We need to develop the kind of churches where children can bring their friends, and members can bring their neighbours.”² Although not directly referring to churches of refuge the sentiment that churches need to change is clear.

Referring back to my personal research survey, the second section of question ten asked, “What would encourage you to return?” The question was deliberately open ended and “change in the emphasis of the church” was one of the areas highlighted by

²Victor Hulbert, “Highlights from the March BUC Committee,” *Messenger*, April 11, 2008, 5.

the respondents. Other aspects of change, such as “a more modern, lively attitude and positive attitude from those leading the church,” and “a more up to-date and modern approach,” or the “church modernising itself towards its attitude” were also specifically mentioned. While these answers would need to be unpacked further they definitely point to this being a significant area to be addressed.

Effective change should not happen by accident and needs to be both planned for and managed. Part of this process would involve bringing as many of the stakeholders as possible to the table for input and evaluation.

In looking further at change there are many aspects to be considered which affect the church at all levels. To be effective change must be considered and implemented well at both the local level as well as on a wider arena. We will look first at the local level using Stanborough Park church, located in Watford, England as an example.

The Local Church

Change has recently been taking place at Stanborough Park as they search for the best way to care for their existing youth, as well as to reach out to those who have an association with the church and become inactive over the years. Under discussion has been a new youth service, running parallel with the main Sabbath morning service.

A concept for this parallel service has been developed with it taking place in the main church complex but in a separate hall. In the past any such initiative has been resisted but in June 2008 the go ahead was given by the church business meeting for this parallel service to commence in September 2008. This represented a very significant step and involved a new paradigm as to the pastoral care of youth in the church through this

new service. Initially the parallel service would operate three out of the four weeks in the month. The church is to be commended for being willing to make this change.

Their mission statement puts to the fore the desire to reach out to inactive youth. This dovetails ideally with my research, already carried out at the church, as documented in chapter four. I have been asked to act as a consultant member of the planning group and as such suggested that they become one of the pilot church of refuge projects, thus turning theory into dynamic practice at the local level. They agreed to do this.

In regards to Youth Ministries on a wider level the need for change was last recognized back in the early 1990s. At this time a Commission on Youth met to look at the restructure of Youth Ministry around a six-point plan including revival, recovery, evangelism, and nurture. As mentioned in chapter one the Autumn Council of 1992 also authorized the formation of a strategic plan to restructure and rebuild Youth Ministry.

I remember joining the Commission for part of the meeting held at Newbold College during this process. The six-point plan was adopted at the 1992 Annual Council but to the best of my knowledge a Strategic Plan for restructuring and rebuilding Youth Ministry has never been finalized.

Changes in Youth Ministry over the Years

I include this section as it emphasizes that change is needed at local and national (or international) levels. The act of authorizing a plan to restructure and rebuild youth ministry fundamentally recognizes that youth ministry is dynamic. Changes of emphasis are inevitable to meet changing societal and generational needs.

In the twenty plus years that I have been a Youth Director I have seen such change take place. For instance, today in a European context Adventist Youth (AY)

societies are a thing of the past and, also, not all churches hold traditional Sabbath afternoon AY programs. Also in today's climate a successful youth ministry does not necessarily have one person leading and the others following, but rather depends upon a partnership between all concerned.

Youth today wish to be empowered to own their ministry. And so in the same vein another shift in focus is from a department imposing programs from above—or top down—to rather resourcing those who deal with the youth at the grass roots level.

As outlined in chapter five, I believe an outcome of this need for change has brought to the fore a new focus on strengthening families and embracing parents as partners in the nurture and spiritual development of their children. This is why I believe that family-based youth ministry is the key to the new approach to youth ministry.

At this point I wish to emphasize that local and wider trends do not exist in a vacuum and seen together can be a part of the overall change process. This can be emphasized through looking more closely at some further statistics from my local church, Stanborough Park, which served as the focus for my youth survey as outlined in chapter four.

Baptismal Statistics

I approached the church clerk and asked her to check back five years and examine the basis of the youth baptisms in the church. Specifically, I wanted to find out whether they had come from children growing up in church families or whether they were from outreach to new families.

The results are shown below in table 3. Over a five year period 14 baptisms of youth under the age of 30 took place in the church. Eleven of these were of youth who

had grown up in church families and were three young people from families that had joined the church in the last ten years. In other words the church has largely grown through biological growth and the nurturing of the youth is as a result of in-reach involving a partnership of a number of stakeholders including parents, Sabbath school teachers, and youth ministries personnel.

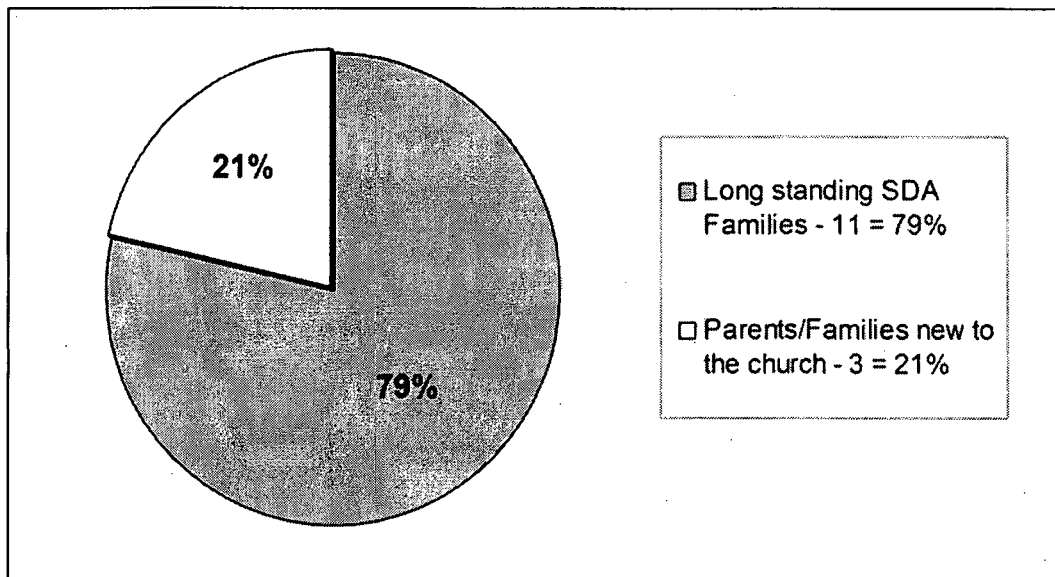


Figure 2: Youth baptisms.

This shows clearly that making families a priority is very important. It leads to the important question, How can we help the parents? The way we answer that question determines both local and national strategy.

Recognizing what is needed is very important. “Too many parents are merely surviving. Your congregation can help them thrive—not only as parents but also as

individual Christians and partners in ministry.”³ Youth ministry must be an active part of this partnership model, embrace change, and help resource parents in leading their boys and girls to Christ. This would help develop better youth ministry across the board and would additionally be a vital tool in reaching out to inactive youth.

Parents certainly need practical support, and greater resourcing, to help bring their children back to Christ. In my experience, this aspect has not been emphasized and I believe now is the time to do so at all levels of the church.

In further looking at change I would like to refer to an area that was highlighted earlier—dealing with the development of male and female spirituality.

The Development of Male and Female Spirituality

It was seen in chapter four that sixteen females responded to the survey but only six boys. Whereas this may just be that boys have a different view of surveys it may also be an area of considerable significance. Recognizing the later development of the male adolescent brain and subsequent issues related to male and female spirituality, as outlined earlier in chapter three, I believe the latter to be the case. As such it is a subject that cannot simply be ignored and deserves a further look.

Looking closer at the total membership gain by accessions to the Stanborough Park church from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2007, it revealed that over this period eighteen females and fourteen males joined the church. Although not as wide a disparity as the survey answers returned from the inactive youth it still showed that this church was

³Jolene Roehlkepartain and Eugene Roehlkepartain, *Embracing Parents* (Abingdon, UK: Abingdon Press, 2004), 1.

reaching more females than males.⁴ While recognizing that further study would be needed on a local level to evaluate this trend it is certainly an observable fact that overall there are more females than males in the church at large and this trend seems likely to continue.

Added to this in Western society there has been a growth in single mothers bringing up their children alone and this too is reflected in the church. My local conference has for some years recognized this by holding a single mother's camp to offer both practical help and support.

The point I am seeking to emphasize is that both sexes have complex issues to be dealt with relating to the development of their spirituality. In developing churches, therefore, where youth can bring their friends we need to be intentional in meeting the needs of both males and females.

The importance to this study is specifically that males and females may respond differently as they return as they have different spiritual needs that will need to be met. One size will almost certainly not suit all and therefore in addressing change we must build for the future allowing for unity and diversity in this important area. At this stage I do not pretend to have the final answer but recognize that it is a real area that will need to be considered.

Finally, in this chapter I wish to examine the future intentions of young people. It is important that while evaluating change, and implementing new initiatives, we also look ahead to what we know about possible implications for the future.

⁴Stanborough Park Church Clerk's Report, 15 April 2008.

Building for the Future

The European Valuegenesis survey included information about the present views and future intentions of the sample age group. In the following table I would like to highlight the answers from questions 36 and 335 of the survey. Seventy-four percent indicated that it was either very important or quite important that they attended a Seventh-day Adventist church (Question 36) and a further 93 percent felt that they would either definitely or probably be active in the Adventist church in twenty years time (Question 335).

These are undoubtedly very encouraging figures. Question 36 relates to now whereas question 335 looks ahead to the future intentions. The challenge for both now and the future will be to help turn good intentions into practice. Only time will tell as to how this is played out in the lives of our current generation.

Question 335 also looked ahead to future activity in the church. It is not enough just to fill a pew. In looking at both present retention and future reclamation of youth this is an important aspect to be stressed. .

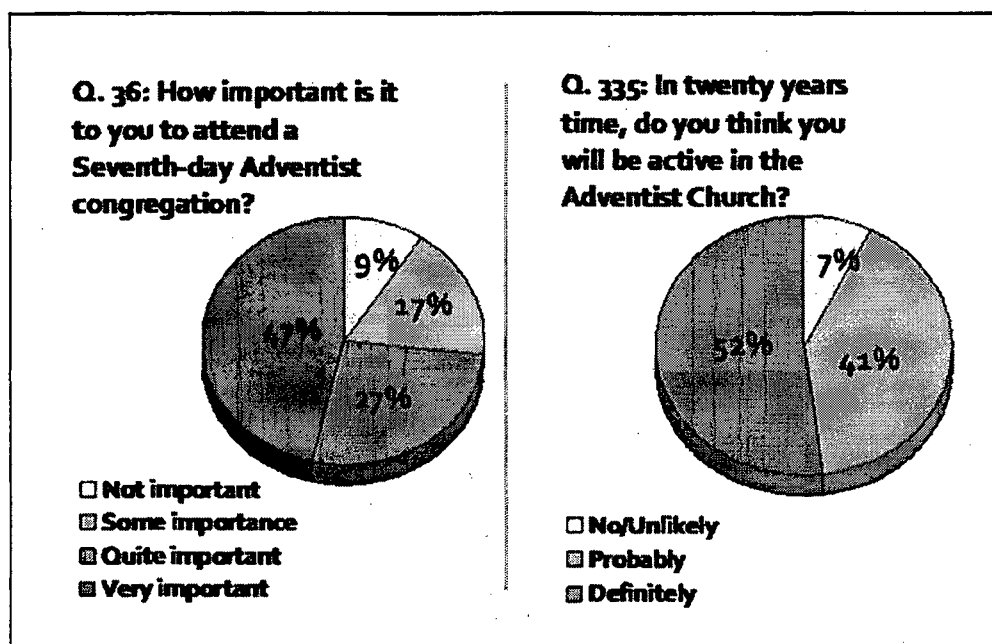


Figure 3: Building for the future.

Here is where the emphasis on feeding the core young people now is recognized as being most important—as those answering are our core youth. They are both our present and future combined and the church must ensure that they are nurtured effectively.

The research and analysis from the European Valuegenesis survey is not yet complete but looking back at the NAD Valuegenesis survey the following were found to be the church effectiveness factors. These factors are timeless and for a church of refuge to be effective in reclaiming, and then retaining, youth as many as possible of these factors would still need to be met.

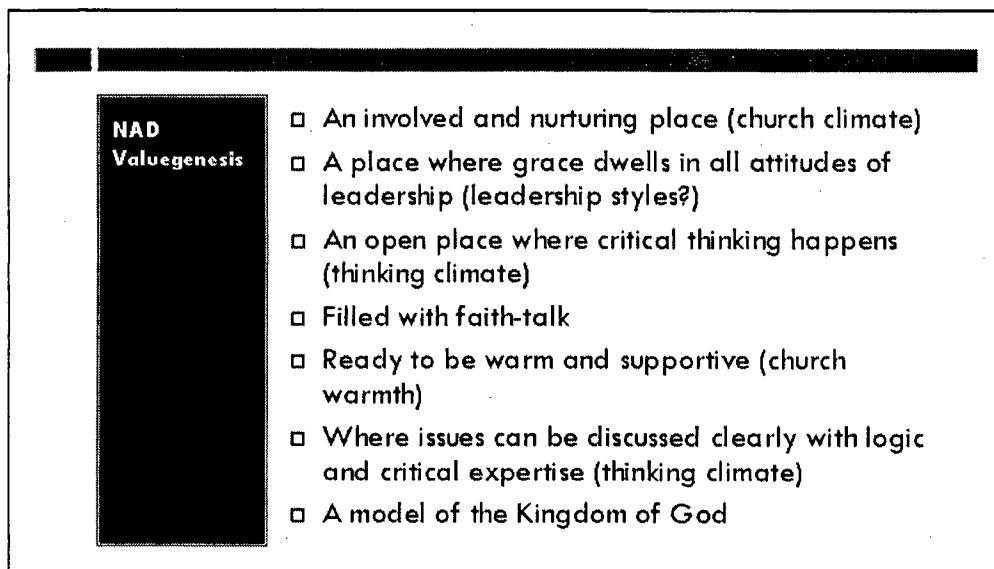


Figure 4: Church effectiveness factors.

We would ideally like all churches to reflect these factors but in looking to reclaim youth they are certainly vital elements that must be put in place ahead of time. The great thing about research is that it enables us to build a better platform for the future.

Timing is also important when implementing change and I sense the church is now ready to not only recognize that change is needed but also that the will is there to do something about it.

A Time for Everything

As the writer of Ecclesiastes stated so profoundly “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Eccl 3:1). It is my firm belief that now is the time for such a change as proposed in the Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan.

There has been a growing concern for the number of youth who are leaving the church and this has been discussed from the General Conference level downwards in the

current quinquennium. Academic institutions have also taken up the challenge and in the autumn of 2008 the Center of Youth Evangelism at Andrews University sponsored a symposium aimed at closing the back door of the church. I participated in this symposium and shared some of the findings from this study and also outlined the implementation process of the TED Strategic Plan.

This is a “time to build” (Eccl 3:3). A time to build a new structure in youth ministry as far as our care for members as a whole, and youth in particular, are concerned. This may even be seen as a paradigm shift in church thinking and the churches of refuge plan for the Trans-European Division is part of this process.

In the last chapter we will look at the recommendations that can be made for the furtherance of this Strategic Plan—recognizing that it is a dynamic document that will be open to revision and updating as part of the process of change.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Young people, in fact members of all ages, are still leaving the church. That is an undeniable fact. Although they are leaving the church they may not, however, necessarily be leaving behind Christianity per se. As the findings from the pilot study showed twenty-one of the twenty-two respondents clearly still saw themselves as being Christian and indeed fifty percent felt that they would one day return to the church of their youth.

In undertaking this project I set out to use the pilot study research findings to help formulate a plan for helping such young people return to the church. Understanding that the church they left did not seem warm and caring raised the question as to what the church must now do about it?

A Strategic Plan for youth friendly churches of refuge was designed. This model was seen to need a systems approach aided by a family-based youth ministry. The aim is for the plan to be progressively introduced throughout the territory of the Trans-European Division by working in consultation with the TED Youth Advisory and liaising closely with the Union Youth directors.

The Strategic plan has been voted by the TED Executive committee with the mandate to plant such churches in the near future. To make this a reality the Churches of

Refuge Action Plan has been incorporated as a key concept in a division-wide training program that began in the summer of 2008. Pilot church of refuge programs are also being instigated in three countries, initially to study the strategic plan, evaluate it during a six month trial period, and then to assess and share their findings ahead of a full division-wide launch of the program.

It is recognized that the model is still a work in progress and by its very nature will continue to be so for some time. Recognizing this I would like to pause for a moment to make a few pertinent conclusions that will help in the ongoing development of the churches of refuge concept.

Conclusions

Warm Memories, Roots, and Identity

The first conclusion recognizes the reality of one of the findings from the pilot study, namely that there are inactive members who will look to return home at some point in their life. In the parable of the Good Shepherd the prodigal reached the point where he “came to his senses” (Luke 15:17) and set out for home. So too it is my firm belief that modern day prodigals will at some time feel the desire to do the same. This may even be in larger numbers and sooner than was once thought possible.

The reasons for this, I believe, are centered in a number of issues involving the positive legacy of past church teaching, warm memories, and a search for a past identity. As one of the respondents to the pilot survey stated, “I still carry and remember a lot of what I was taught with me every day. I get my children to pray every eve but need to learn more so I can answer their questions” Another reflected about a return one day and

stated, “My departure from the church was a gradual one, if there is going to be a return, it’ll also be a gradual one.”

So what will bring those forces into play to help precipitate a return? Roger Standing in his recent book, *The Re-Emerging Church*, looked at Baby Boomers¹ and posits that “the search is about roots and identity, and a certain degree of familiarity will be helpful.”² He feels that almost on a whim many will try at least once to re-connect with church, and most probably with the denomination of their youth.³

This was certainly found to be true in another study of returning former Adventists who definitely expressed that they still had warm memories from their childhood. “Eight out of ten persons interviewed expressed memories of early Adventism that reminded them of happy times in the church.”⁴

The search for identity is not static. Just as “it is part of finding one’s own identity that pushes young people to challenge the values of the parents and seek to incorporate a value system of their own.”⁵ So too the reverse search for identity may well bring them back one day to their roots. “It is clear, however, that many youth who

¹Baby Boomers are the generation born between 1946 and 1964. This group will reach retirement age in 2011 onwards and Standing feels that when faced with issues of their own mortality will seek to re-connect with the church of their youth.

²Roger Standing, *Re-Emerging Church: Strategies for Reaching a Returning Generation* (Abingdon, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008), 10.

³Roger Standing sees in particular the Baby Boom generation searching for their roots when they hit retirement age (from 2011) and when they will inevitably be faced with the big questions of life. They are the generation that still has a biblical background and as such he feels they will then turn back to the church or denomination of their youth.

⁴Tim Lale and Pat Habada, *Ten Who Came Back* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 157.

⁵Gane, “Reclaiming Our Youth,” 17.

question their parents' values and beliefs ultimately accept them as their own.”⁶ Roots and identity are, therefore, a powerful combination.

Allied to this, no matter how long or short a time someone has been away from the church returning is always a possibility. In the pilot study the focus groups identified key life stages where a person may be influenced again to think of spiritual matters. These include times when things go wrong—financial, relationships, health, etc.—and also when things are going well—marriage and birth of children. Such occurrences are not respecters of age and can occur at any time and then the same issues of roots, identity, and familiarity will most likely play a significant role in helping people set out for home.

Churches of refuge are not an easy option. As people set out for home it must be recognized that both they and the church will have a number of issues to face at this time. Not all who return, for instance, will be part of a traditional family structure, and issues regarding marriage, divorce, and relationships outside of marriage will need to be faced.

Also just as youth left at different times and for differing reasons in reality they will also come back in different ways and at different times. Put simply not all people leave for the same reasons and not all returning youth will come back in the same way.

Members of churches of refuge will need to have a heart for returning youth and be committed to helping them to re-connect and stay connected. We may have only one chance to get it right, otherwise they may leave again and this time never to return.

⁶Ibid.

A Community of Faith

The second point that will need to be born in mind as part of the conclusion to this work is the need to create a vibrant community of faith at a local level. Irrespective of their age group, everyone needs to feel that they belong to a group that they understand.

There are important elements to creating community. “In a significant community people share a common memory or tradition, common understandings and ways of life, and common goals or purposes.”⁷ Many returning Seventh-day Adventists still have this common memory and tradition so have the possibility of fitting well into a new faith community.

Such communities of faith also share a common story, with common rituals around which it orders its being. It must be “more like a familial community than an institution.”⁸ Also a community of faith will be able to bind together all different types of people and value their uniqueness. Churches of refuge can be uniquely placed to meet these common points and by so doing be attractive to returning inactive members.

How can this community be developed? It may start simply and it will almost certainly be relational at the core. In the sequel to his book *Churchless Faith*, Alan Jamieson looks at the faith journeys of those who have left five years on and makes the following simple yet profound observation. “One of the most significant supports anyone can offer to people considering leaving the church or re-assessing their faith is to listen to

⁷Westerhoff, 51.

⁸Ibid., 75.

them. Until they are heard they cannot hear!”⁹ This means listening without preconceptions and non-judgmentally, it also means listening for as long as it takes.

My conclusion, therefore, is that these first two aspects, of roots and identity combined with a developing community of faith, give much cause for optimism.

Intentionality

The third conclusion is that, as a church, we must not only develop a heart for the inactive, but also we must be intentional about our wish for them to return. It is a tragic indictment that so few are contacted or followed up when they leave the church. The focus groups in my study were clear that we must keep in contact with and continually pray for, our prodigal youth.

At the same time we must seek new ways to help them make the necessary transitions to enable them to return. The desired end result must not be that they just attend church once, but rather that they become part of a spiritually growing community of faith, a community where their personal faith can be nurtured afresh.

Recommendations

With these conclusions in mind the following seven recommendations are made:

1. Immediate Priority

This dissertation has been presented in recognition that the effective care of young people today must be seen as (a) an immediate priority, (b) a strategic priority, and (c) a

⁹Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh, and Adrienne Thompson, *Church Leavers: Faith Journeys Five Years On* (London: SPCK, 2006), 109.

critical issue for all Christian leaders.¹⁰ The Strategic Plan for the Trans-European Division is not presented as the final answer but most definitely as a dynamic and workable plan that recognizes that the reclamation and retention of youth is possible, especially where a vibrant community of faith can be established. The church has a limited window of opportunity which demands that the time of action is now.

2. Reclamation and Retention of Existing and Returning Youth

The church must address both reclamation and retention together. These elements are flip sides of the same coin and do not exist in a vacuum. Well thought through ministries to retain both existing youth growing up in SDA families—our second generation plus children—as well as those returning, are vital.

Practically reclamation cannot be looked at in isolation. The simple reason for this is that when the youth are encouraged to return we must have equally well thought out strategies to help retain them. Otherwise they may leave again, this time never to return.

Such strategies would include focusing attention on the younger ages as well as challenging the core of our teens and youth. Working closely with families will also be important (see point six below) to enable parents to increase the likelihood of successful transference of Christian SDA values to the next generation.

Within the Trans-European Division our recommended goal is also to retain at least seventy percent of the children and youth. This must be addressed by each country and leads to the third recommendation related to contextualization.

¹⁰Andy Hickford, *Essential Youth* (Carlisle, UK: Spring Harvest Publishing, 2003), 202.

3. Contextualization

The specific elements (Criteria and Action Steps) of the Churches of Refuge Strategic Plan initiative will need to be contextualized for use in the many different countries throughout the Trans-European Division. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of contextualize is, “To place in or treat as part of the context.”¹¹ A working definition, however, for our purposes would be to make the teaching meaningful and understandable to all people in their cultural context or setting.

The practical reason for this is to find common ground with the people we want to reach. Churches of refuge will vary in appearance from country to country as they are contextualized to meet the cultural needs. It is the intentionality that is the key rather than any outward appearance.

4. Reviews, Exchanges, and Training

a. A review of the criteria and ongoing action plans would need to take place in each church on an annual basis. It is important that the criteria are regularly reviewed to not only see that they are being currently met but also that it is the continuing intention for these to remain in place. By so doing the action plan will remain dynamic and will develop as the needs of those returning become clear in each setting. These needs will be relevant to their age and gender groupings, the faith journey of the returning believers, and other local variables. This review process could practically be achieved at a church board or business type meeting.

¹¹*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (2002), s.v. “Contextualization.”

b. Training programs will also be needed to help key people to re-connect with inactive or missing members. This will include training in how and when to visit and what to say and not say at this time. Training will be needed in listening skills and how to provide support and friendship in a non-judgmental manner. Bearing in mind that churches of refuge aim to attract and hold young people instruction will be needed in relational issues. This is particularly important when considering the fact that the number one reason given for leaving was the perceived critical attitude of older members. Practical issues such as learning names and the importance of unconditional acceptance would be some of the areas needed to be covered.

c. Regular church of refuge exchanges or conferences will need to be scheduled to promote training and networking of the core leadership teams. These can happen on a national and international level very much after the model of church planting exchanges. At these exchanges the attributes of the original cities of refuge will be continued to be explored—namely the need to be accessible, protective, and welcoming to those in need. In addition, just as when the Israelites' territory enlarged more cities of refuge were added so too will the constant need to increase, both the number and effectiveness, of churches of refuge.

5. Transition Points

Transition points will need to be clearly thought through by each local church or group. Issues of roots and identity indicate that at some time many youth will look to return and steps must be taken to facilitate this possibility by creating small groups, social gatherings, or other strategies to help ease the way. Such transition points will also be part of an ongoing and equally well thought through discipleship pathway.

At Stanborough they have set their new parallel service to act as such a transition point for those who would find it hard to come back to the main service. They have deliberately set the meeting at 11:00 a.m. in the church complex to be in line with the roots and identity of those familiar with our church traditions.

In other cases the transition group may well meet in a home and not necessarily on a Sabbath morning. This is also in accordance with the local variables as mentioned in recommendation 4a above.

6. Family-based Youth Ministry

Partnering with, and resourcing parents, must be a key feature in both retaining and reclaiming youth. Just as no man is an island unto himself so no young person exists in a vacuum. This was quite clear from my study of inactive young people from my local church. With this in mind ministry teams would be recommended to visit homes to find out what the church and the home can do together for all the children of the family, according to their particular needs and present situation. If the youngsters are inactive this also means exploring together what connections can be made to help encourage them towards home.

7. Re-connecting with a wider community

Finally a strategy at the local level will need to be put in place for re-connecting returning members with a wider church community and not just to a local church or group in isolation. This too should also be part of the wider discipleship program.

In the case of Stanborough this has already been set in place with the parallel service meeting with the main church once a month, in addition to each week the two congregations socializing together in the church halls. For others there may well need to

be other types of meeting places but it is important that at some time the returning members will need to be re-assimilated into the wider church body.

This is an important point to consider particularly for the long term future of those returning. Society today is very mobile and if and when they move location we wish for them to be able to connect with a new Seventh-day Adventist church family.

The Desired Outcome

The effectiveness of the Strategic Plan will inevitably lie at the grass roots level where fellowship, nurture, worship, and mission can take place. Equipped with these attributes the early church grew to the point where “every day the Lord added to them those that were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

It must be also recognized that just as there are many links in a chain Churches of Refuge may well be only one link in the reclamation process. It is not important whether they are the first, middle, or last chain but rather that they provide a strong link to making returning home possible.

The desired outcome is that returning prodigals have the chance to return to a church home that is ready and waiting to greet them. A church that greets modern day prodigals in the same way as the father greeted the prodigal son in the parable of Luke chapter 15.

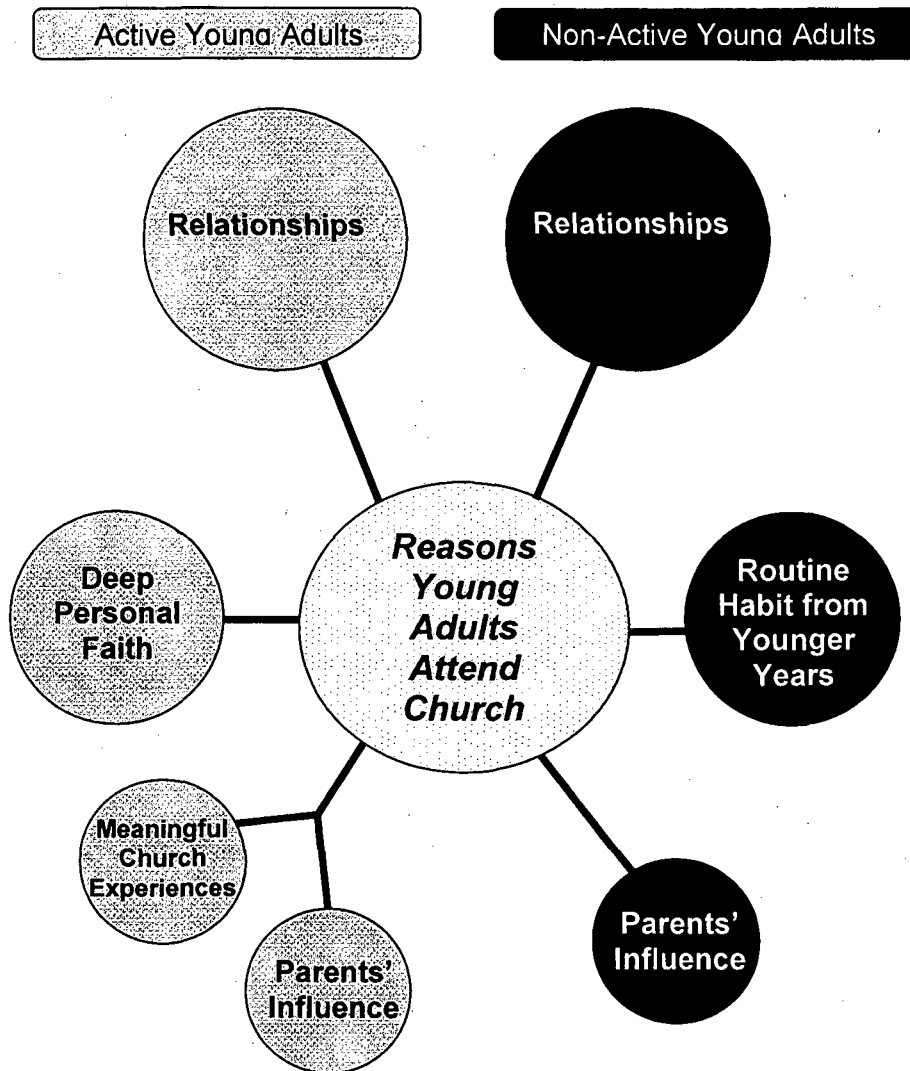
In his book *Christ's Way of Reaching People*, Philip Samaan makes a statement with which I would like to conclude this paper: “The church ought to be a refuge where hurt persons find healing and restoration in Christ and His people.”¹² It can be.

¹²Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1990), 30.

APPENDIX A

REASONS YOUNG ADULTS ATTEND CHURCH

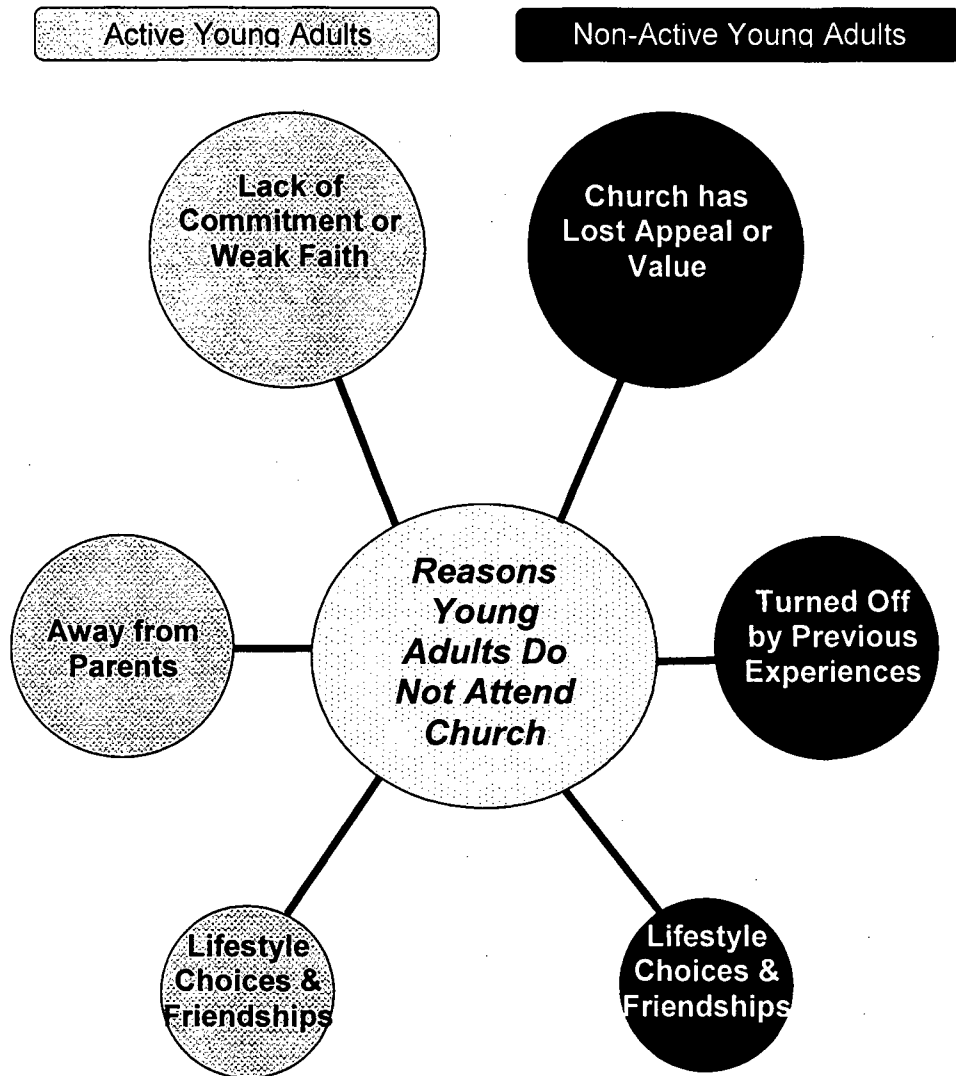
From Baptist Youth Study (Wesley Black)



APPENDIX B

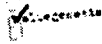
REASONS YOUNG ADULTS DO NOT ATTEND CHURCH

From Baptist Youth Study (Wesley Black)



VALUEGENESIS EUROPE

who's changing
the church?



BENCHMARK
Comparative Analysis
July 2007

TED (weighted by REDRESSMENT)

REFERENCE = Europe (Total sample)

F1. Church commitment

Q338 : Perspective about being an Adventist in adult age					
No	20	1.9%	1.7%		0.2%
Unlikely	50	5.0%	4.8%		0.2%
Probably	403	39.9%	41.4%		-1.6%
Definitely	538	53.3%	52.1%		1.2%

Q36 : importance of attending a Seventh-day Adventist congregation					
Not important : spiritual life independent from church	30	3.0%	2.0%		1.0%
Not important : another denomination would be ok	30	3.0%	1.7%		1.2%
Not important : doing voluntary work would be just as relevant	17	1.7%	1.1%		0.5%
Some importance	163	15.1%	15.2%		-0.1%
Quite important	263	25.0%	27.4%		-1.4%
Very important	522	51.4%	52.5%		-1.1%
TED (weighted by REDRESSMENT)			TOT		

Q178 : Which best describes your involvement in responsible roles in your congregation?					
I have been given the opportunity and often cover responsible roles	300	30.2%	32.5%		-2.3%
I have been given the opportunity and occasionally get involved in responsible roles	340	34.1%	36.3%		-2.1%
I have been given the opportunity and don't usually get involved in responsible roles	136	13.6%	13.5%		<0.1%
I have not been given the opportunity and this is fine with me	142	14.3%	10.2%		4.1%
I have not been given the opportunity and I am not happy about this	77	7.7%	7.5%		0.2%

Q201 : Compared to 2 years ago, do you think you participate in the activities of your congregation, more, less, or about the same amount as you did then?					
More	486	47.7%	49.4%		-1.6%
About the same	299	29.4%	29.9%		-0.5%
Less	192	18.8%	18.1%		0.7%
Does not apply	41	4.0%	2.6%		1.4%
TED (weighted by REDRESSMENT)			TOT		

Q177 : identify your financial support of your congregation					
10% of my income	408	39.9%	46.3%		-6.4%
Less than 10% of my income	73	7.2%	5.9%		1.3%
Do not currently tithe	292	28.6%	27.7%		0.8%
Regular offerings	554	54.2%	40.8%		13.4%
No regular offerings	193	18.9%	27.3%		-8.4%
Give to specific activities (ADRA, AWR, etc.)	227	22.2%	18.1%		4.1%
Give to independent Adventist ministries	39	3.8%	6.5%		-2.7%
Give to other humanitarian organisations	132	12.9%	6.8%		6.0%
TED (weighted by REDRESSMENT)			TOT		

APPENDIX D

BRINGING HOME OUR ADVENTIST PRODIGALS

Questions for Focus groups (Verbal Discussions)

Introduction

We realise that we lose a significant number of our youth in their teens or early twenties. This trend is hurting families, congregations and the church as a whole and is an issue that must be addressed. Your views on the following questions will greatly help us to address this problem.

Discussion Questions

1. As a church, how can we nurture our children in a way that establishes their faith in Jesus Christ?
2. When the teenage drive for independence begins to lead them to reject parental values, what practical steps can a church take to help families?
3. What do you think are the three most important things that a church can do if someone stops attending church?
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)
4. What do you consider are the key points in life when a person may be influenced to think again on spiritual matters?
5. From your observations, what are the main reasons people return to church or faith again?
6. What can we do to help people feel accepted and involved when they return to church?

APPENDIX E

YOUTH SURVEY

I'm doing a survey to find out the views of young people who used to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Your thoughts are important to the Church in helping us better meet the needs of our youth. If you are willing to take part please complete the following questions. All your answers will be confidential and will not be attributed to you. (Parental permission will be required for those under 18 years of age.)

The information gained will be used as part of a Doctor of Ministry dissertation and will also help form a strategic plan for the Trans-European Division Youth department.

1. How long did you attend church regularly?

2. Who did you used to attend church with:

- a) Family? ☐
- b) Friends? ☐
- c) By yourself? ☐

3. What did you like about church?

4. What did you dislike about church?

5. Were you: (please tick)

- | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) Dedicated as a child? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Baptised in the Church? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. At what age did you stop attending?

7. Why did you stop attending church?

8. Many young people don't go to church. Please consider the list of possible reasons below, tick those you consider appropriate, and prioritise your responses by ranking the most important from 1-10 in the second box. (1 being the most important) Please feel free to add any other reasons.

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Tick</u>	<u>Priority No.</u>
Adult members living phoney lives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Church places too much emphasis on non-essentials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church leaders are pre-occupied with organisation, not concerned with people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worship services are dull and meaningless.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not want to be a hypocrite.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church is too restrictive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attracted to a different lifestyle.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not have any real friends at Church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church does not allow me to think for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other		

9. Do you still have friends or family in the church?

- a) Friends Yes ☐ No ☐
b) Family Yes ☐ No ☐

10. Do you think you might come back to church again one day?

Yes ☐ No ☐

What would encourage you to return?

11. Do you think Christianity is still relevant to you? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please explain further.

12. Personal Information: Age _____ Gender _____

Thank You for your help.

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORMS

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Doctor of Ministry Programme

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT
Youth Survey

I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to discover the reasons that some young people choose either not to attend or to leave the church. I understand that my son or daughter's participation is voluntary, confidential, and will not cost anything. I understand that refusal to participate in this study, or withdrawal at any time, involves no penalties and that his/her identity will not be disclosed in any published document.

I understand that the format of the study will involve my son/daughter answering twelve survey questions, on a pre-prepared form, that should take no more than 45 minutes. I also understand that for children under 18 years parental consent is required before the survey can be conducted, and that two copies will be provided, one of which I may retain.

I understand that if I have any questions I may contact either the researcher (first named) or the researcher's advisor (second named):

Pastor Paul Tompkins
149 Sheepcot Lane
Watford
Herts. WD25 0ED
England.

Dr Barry Gane
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University
Berrien Springs MI 49104

ptompkins@ted-adventist.org bgane@andrews.edu
01923 893572 (home)

I have read the contents of this Consent Form and have listened to the verbal explanations given by the researcher. I hereby give my voluntary consent for _____ to participate in this study.

_____ (signature)

_____ (date)

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Doctor of Ministry Programme

INFORMED CONSENT
Youth Survey

I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to discover the reasons that some young people choose either not to attend or to leave the church. I understand that my participation is voluntary, confidential, and will not cost me anything. I understand that refusal to participate in this study, or withdrawal at any time, involves no penalties and that my identity will not be disclosed in any published document.

I understand that the format of the study will involve answering twelve survey questions on a pre-prepared form which should take no more than 45 minutes. I also understand that if I am under 18 years of age parental consent will also be required before the survey can be conducted, and that two copies will be provided, one of which I may retain.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns I may contact either the researcher (first named) or the researcher's advisor (second named):

Pastor Paul Tompkins
149 Sheepcot Lane
Watford
Herts. WD25 0ED
England

Dr Barry Gane
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

ptompkins@ted-adventist.org bgane@andrews.edu
Tel: 01923 893572 (home)

I have read the contents of this Consent Form and have listened to the verbal explanation given by the researcher. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

_____ (signature)

_____ (date)

G. C. STRATEGIC THEME #3

RECLAIMING

The General Conference Youth Ministries Department firmly believes in the need of facing the challenge of looking for and reclaiming the lost. We have always been attentive to and cared about young people that are born in families already in the church; but they are leaving the church like water between our fingers. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, shows us how Christ, as the Good Shepherd, looks for His lost sheep until it is found; while leaving the other 99 in a safe place. As youth pastors we must imitate this example.

Emphasis # 1

Create an extensive list of all the young people registered in your AYS group and find out who is actually attending and who is not. If it's not possible to get a complete list, use the names you have and then ask the young people of your church for names and addresses of their friends that used to come, but no longer attend church. Assign someone to work with the missing members when you make contact.

Emphasis # 2

Have an annual Re-Encounter program, spanning three months, culminating in a Homecoming Sabbath celebration.

- start a Prayer list for all inactive youth.

Emphasis # 3

Call young people who are not attending and invite them to social activities. Give them time to decide. If you have called them once, twice or even three times and they do not respond do not be discouraged, try again.

Emphasis # 4

Start group visits. If possible have the meetings in the homes of the missing young people.

The pastor and the friends of the missing youth play a very important role in winning them back. Invite friends to accompany you on these visits.

Emphasis # 5

Hold an annual Conference/Division-wide Homecoming Sabbath where the whole program is specifically arranged with the returning youth in mind. This should be held in all churches on the same date.

Emphasis # 6

Organize a Youth Mentoring program. Each returning young person should be linked with an established believer who can encourage them. Prepare a Youth Mentoring Manual.

Emphasis # 7

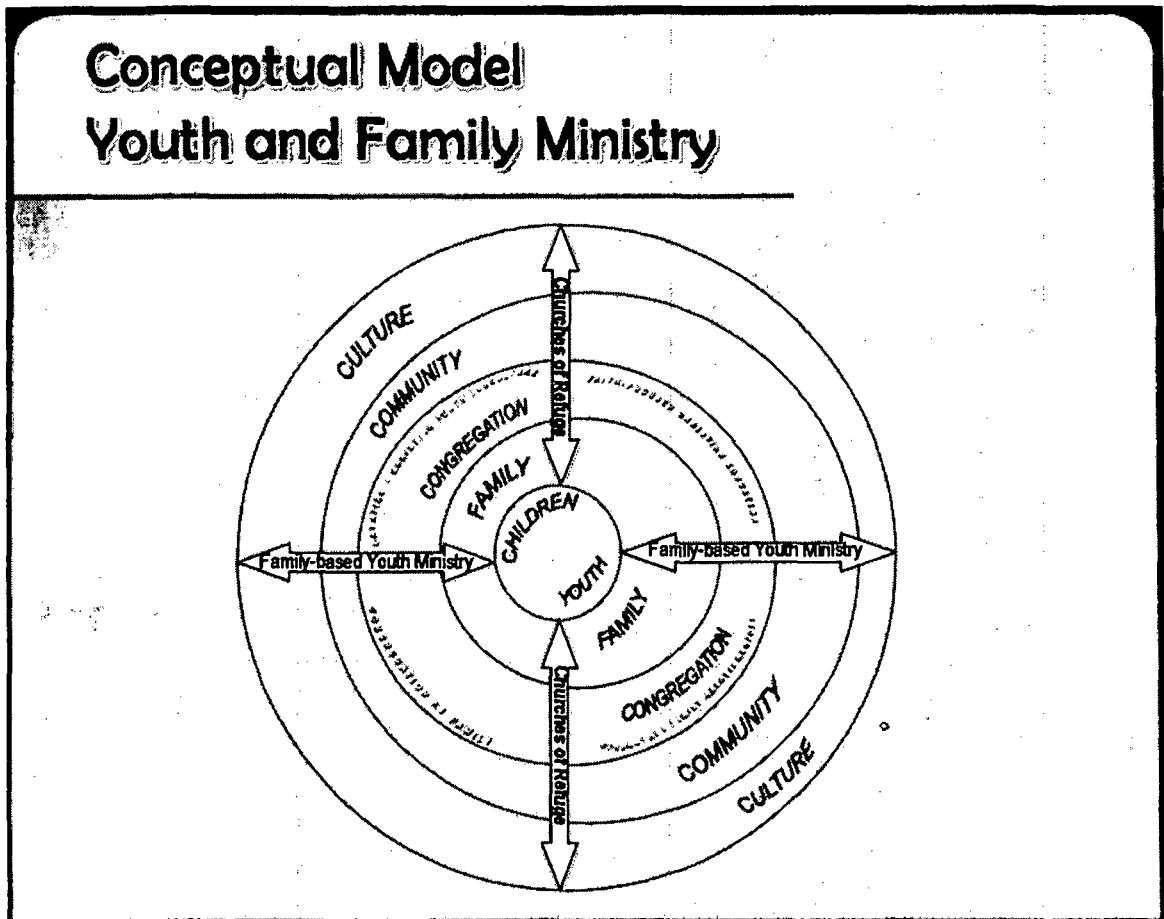
Educate the church so that they can be friendly and warm towards the returning young people. Allow the young people space to grow and develop in their Christian experience.

Emphasis # 8

Help returning young people to become involved in the life of the church. If possible link them with a youth small group.

APPENDIX H

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF YOUTH AND FAMILY¹



¹Adapted from a Conceptual Model as shown in Strommen and Hardel, 12.

APPENDIX I

CHURCHES OF REFUGE

SUMMARY SHEET

Project Title: Churches of Refuge

Division: Trans-European Division

Person Responsible: Paul Tompkins, TED Youth Director

Contact Details: ptompkins@ted-adventist.org

Background: Deuteronomy 19

Vision:

A church of refuge is a church that is intentional about young people ensuring that young people feel protected, that they are valued and can get involved.

Criteria & Action Steps

The following Criteria and Action Steps have been developed at a series of meetings commencing at the TED Youth Advisory in October 2007.

A small group has since met on two occasions to develop the plan to its present stage and a further small group meeting is planned for 15th May 2008 to look at formulating a further Plan of Action.

CRITERIA AND ACTION STEPS

CRITERIA	ACTION STEPS
<p>1. The church's main focus is to unconditionally accept young people and be intentional in assisting their faith development.</p>	<p>A church of refuge accepts the different stages of faith young people go through. Communicating these stages to the wider church congregation. Learning to accept them for who they are, not for what we want them to be or do.</p> <p>The following stages should inform our activities and plans:</p> <p>From 6-12 At this stage kids reflect the faith of their parents. A church of refuge will therefore encourage and resource parents to have a living faith enabling them to share this with their children in a natural way. (e.g. Kids in Discipleship)</p> <p>From 12-16 Helping them to discover a holistic identity which they want to commit to through baptism. This holistic identity should enable them to engage relevantly with the wider society. Possible resources in helping with this process are: identity-confirming activities (e.g.: Absolute Nine, Underground).</p> <p>From 16-25 committed to helping them move from a corporate to a personal faith identity. Helping them with questions about the corporate identity to which they committed in the previous stage. Creating an thinking climate in which young people can explore how their faith makes a difference in real life issues. (e.g. Relay)</p>
<p>2. Intentionally includes young people in the development and ongoing evaluation of its aims and vision, and where all young people are aware of the vision.</p>	<p>A church of refuge has or develops a mission and a vision for the local community. A church of refuge sees its youth as an integral part of the church and therefore actively seeks to include its youth in its vision and mission. She communicates this vision clearly to its youth by sharing it and asking involvement during its development and evaluating it regularly together with its youth.</p> <p><i>Vision Development</i></p> <p>In the development of the mission and vision for the congregation, the leadership of the church asks actively the input of the young people. This can be done either through the involvement of youth in the vision committee or a special meeting with the young people. Young people are seen as an essential group who needs to own the vision of the church.</p>

	<p><i>Evaluation of the vision and programme</i></p> <p>The leadership actively assists the youth in evaluating the different programmes the church offers. This can be done either through a survey or a direct discussion with the youth. The leadership commits itself in taking these comments seriously.</p> <p>Throughout the whole process a church of refuge is fully aware that depending on the stage of faith development, youth will be more or less involved in the vision of the church or in the development of this vision. Regardless of the response of the young people, the leadership will nevertheless persist in their commitment to engaging young people in the vision of the church.</p>
<p>3. A church that clearly communicates to their young people what they can expect and provides opportunities for young people to get involved in the mission of the church.</p>	<p>A church of refuge will make a charter so that young people will know what to expect in your church. Such a charter will define for the church its commitment to young people and communicate to young people something of the church's philosophy and value system.</p> <p>A Charter could look something like this:</p> <p><i>Because our church's main focus is young people and their faith development, we want to assure you that when you come to our church you can expect the following to be in place:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>You will be greeted in a comfortable and non-threatening way.</i> 2. <i>There will be a well run and resourced Sabbath School class which is relevant to your age group and which will be discussing issues you are interested in.</i> 3. <i>Our worship service will be made with young people in mind. We will do that by involving young people in the planning and running of our worship service.</i> 4. <i>Our church is an inclusive church. We will therefore listen to and respect your theological thoughts and questions. This is a church where we believe we can learn from each other.</i> 5. <i>This is a church which will regularly seek your thoughts and advice in conjunction with the mission and vision of the church. We welcome positive input from young people. Further, we will encourage, though without pressure, ownership of that vision and its implementation.</i> 6. <i>Because our church is a church which cares passionately for young people, you can expect to be prayed for on a regular basis.</i> 7. <i>You can expect regular opportunities for social togetherness. Many of these activities will take place in our dedicated youth room.</i>

	<p><i>It is our hope that you will make this church your spiritual home and that you find this an inclusive church which welcomes you for who you are and will engage positively with the contributions that you make.</i></p> <p><i>Should you have input on anything in our church you are welcome to contact... So and so on this and that...</i></p> <p>Such a charter should not be so ambitious that a church of refuge does not manage to deliver. Make sure that what you write in your charter is well within what you are able to do. And then plan well, and communicate the charter on a regular basis to all core members and leaders. The charter needs to be central to the church calendar, sermon themes, and board meetings.</p>
<p>4. Committed to actively seeking and getting in contact with young people who are moving, or have moved, into your vicinity.</p>	<p>A church of refuge will know that every academic year, students are leaving home and arriving in university/college settings.</p> <p>Knowing this, the church will seek to identify and establish contact with new students moving into their area. The Conference may be able to help with this. Having located a new student the following guidelines should be observed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The church of refuge will seek to make contact immediately with any student moving into their church area.</i> 2. <i>That each student be provided with a student pack. This could include the churches charter, services, youth activities and small group and bible study possibilities.</i> 3. <i>That each church of refuge sets aside a month at the beginning of the academic year focused on students.</i> <p>A church of refuge will also be aware of students who are leaving and moving to another area. They will have systems in place to make sure that the receiving church is informed of the arrival of this student. The church will continue to be a place of refuge for the outgoing student by staying in contact while they are away and keeping them up to date with church news.</p>
<p>5. Is committed to staying in contact with anyone who for whatever reason has taken a break from active church fellowship.</p>	<p>A church of refuge should assess the membership retention capacity with regard to all young people connected to the church. This will require careful review of all records, checking for absent members and mapping your church according to: core, committed, crowd, and fringe or inactive members.</p>

	<p>In mapping the church go back over the past five years and be aware of important local patterns including age ranges and male/female ratios of absent members.</p> <p>Assessment of the situation should be followed by deliberate steps to address the situation. This would include recruiting and training a team of volunteers to re-connect with those who have discontinued church fellowship.</p> <p>In addressing the situation the following points of emphases could be incorporated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Create an extensive list of all fringe or inactive youth. b) Call young people who are not attending and invite them to social activities. (take attention of damaged relationships) c) Sensitively start volunteer group visits of inactive youth. d) Have an annual 3 month re-encounter programme specifically arranged with returning youth in mind. These three months would include the education of the church so that they can be friendly and warm towards returning young people, an annual "Homecoming Sabbath" and a system for including returning young people in the life of the church. e) Organize a youth mentoring programme - each returning young person should be linked with an established believer who can help them.
<p>6. Committed to systematically and sensitively pray for all of its young people.</p>	<p>Our young people need the prayers of their church. A church of refuge has a systematic prayer ministry young people through which they will be blessed and know that they are cared for while the church as a whole will become more conscious of the task and responsibility they have towards their young people. The prayer ministry should be:</p> <p>Systematic: Maybe 1 to 3 specific young people could be prayed for each week, covering all the churches young people in the course of a quarter. This could be done through the churches prayer ministry, Sabbath school, or by involving the older people in the church. How about engaging those who are not able to physically support the youth programme, especially those who are home bound? A church of refuge should be a church where all are involved in the project. Prayer for the young people is a way of engaging the whole church in the values presented in this document.</p> <p>Sensitive: Divine service may not be the ideal time to name names. A prayer ministry needs to be aware that many young people have a need to be low key. There may be specific issues that would be unwise to take up in a public setting. Prayer, especially public prayer, should be positive and avoid embarrassing individuals and families. It is advised that a</p>

	<p>prayer list be made that includes every young person, not just those we deem to be in special need of prayer. This will avoid anyone feeling that they have been singled out or forgotten.</p> <p>Inclusive: It is suggested that the prayer programme would include present attendees, church young people who have moved temporarily away, young people who no longer attend, and young people who occasionally attend. In other words, all young people that the church has any contact with.</p> <p>An effective prayer ministry for young people will help the church internalize the values outlined in this document as well as helping young people to know that they are cared for and accepted by the church of refuge.</p>
<p>7. A designated youth elder, someone with a feeling for young people, aware of their spiritual journey, appointed by and member of the church board.</p>	<p>A church of refuge takes the youth seriously by appointing a youth elder, who is approachable by youth, and respected by both young people and the leadership of the church. The youth elder will be a voice for the young people at the church board (in addition to the youth leader) and is interested in the youth for who they are and guides them in their spiritual journey.</p> <p>The youth elder will also function as a confidential advisor on issues the youth might face. He also advises, coaches and trains young persons for leadership.</p> <p>As a regular elder the youth elder is part of the elder's team and as a youth leader he is part of the regular youth leadership team where he will function as a mentor.</p> <p>The youth elder, together with the local pastor and the youth leader are the first point of call for the youth director in developing and evaluating the church of refuge programme.</p>
<p>8. A church of refuge will seek to integrate young people in the leadership of the church.</p>	<p>The seriousness with which a church takes young people is often indicated by the involvement of young people in leadership at all levels of the church. Youth involvement in leadership will lead to ownership by the youth and positive input by the youth in terms of the churches programmes and mission.</p> <p>Therefore a church of refuge will have the following in place:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A minimum of 2 young people under the age of 26 on the church board. 2. A close working and mentoring relationship between the youth representatives on the board and the youth elder who will often have greater

	<p>experience and whose mandate as youth elder includes the mentoring and coaching of young people in leadership.</p> <p>3. There will be training in youth leadership and follow up with the aim of ensuring that leadership for young people is a positive experience with which they are able to succeed and do well.</p>
<p>9. Provides a physical meeting space for young people, with the opportunities to socialize.</p>	<p>The evangelistic strategy of the church should provide means for young people to meet together and nurture their faith. This would include both a physical meeting place to socialize (where possible) and also by providing intentional worship services at the church as well as other off-site spiritual retreats.</p> <p>A place of their own in a church provides youth with a safe haven and helps to build community. It can be used in a variety of ways including counselling, networking, training and socializing. It is important that it can be used throughout the week and not just on Sabbath.</p> <p>Youth leaders and other adult mentors can and should join with young people on an informal basis, as well as for designated meetings. The core members of the youth group, and/or youth committee, should be allowed to both create and own the necessary rules for such a room or retreat.</p> <p>At church events or spiritual retreats the intentional provision of a dedicated and creative prayer room, or chapel tent, where youth can retreat to and spend time in private contemplation should be provided whenever possible.</p>
<p>10. Having a substantial dedicated youth budget with a focus on resources for meaningful youth ministry, with consultation of the young people.</p>	<p>A church of refuge whose vision is to bring the passionate love of God to all will recognize that there is no future for the church without meaningful investment of a wide range of resources in their youth work. This will necessitate the church setting aside and making available adequate financial resources to facilitate such a ministry where the youth can feel valued and a sense of ownership of the ministry of the church. These finances are needed in order to make this ministry a reality.</p> <p>Such financial resources must be prepared in consultation with and not excluding:</p> <p>a. All the youth themselves to ascertain the accuracy of the ministry being proposed and its relevance, both to themselves and to their peers whom they are trying to reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.</p>

	<p>b. The elected youth leadership and their team.</p> <p>c. The leadership of the church; who will have ministry to youth high on their agenda as part of a strategy of retention, involvement and ownership.</p>
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Churches of Refuge

Recommend (Spring Meetings 2008)

- 1. Record receipt of the Churches of Refuge document with the TED Youth Dept to further prepare a Plan of Action for developing the concept. (New and Existing Churches)
- 2. Aim to plant 25 "Church (City) of Refuge" type churches – one refuge church per country – led by and for youth – where young people with challenges can be embraced and their immediate needs are met.
- 3. Incorporate the Churches of Refuge criteria & action steps in the TED Relay training programme(FCYO)



APPENDIX J

FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN YOUTH OUTREACH

Level
Credits
Lecturer

Aims

This course aims to give the student the opportunity to discover their own evangelistic style and to be able to apply this in a practical setting. The students will also explore Biblical models of outreach and develop a plan of action to combine and apply these models in the light of both their evangelistic style and as contextualised into 21st Century youth culture.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module the student should be able to:

1. Understand the principles of "Full -Cycle Evangelism"
2. Assess their unique Spiritual gifts having taken a Spiritual Gifts Inventory.
3. Discover their own evangelistic style through analysing Biblical outreach models..
4. Prepare an Outreach plan of action in the light of the above.

What is Taught

A witnessing module that will include both Biblical principles and also give practical expression to individual Christian experiences. This will include:

1. Looking at Youth and Evangelism from the following perspectives; a) The example and commands of Jesus b) The teaching and practice of the Apostles c) The counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy.
2. Reviewing in a group setting a student's own faith experience. Learning how to prepare their story and share it with others in a natural and non threatening manner.
3. Looking at principles of Saving Youth in the 21st Century (unchurched, churchd and "prodigal" youth).
4. A careful study of the TED "Churches of Refuge" Strategic Plan for youth reclamation and retention.
5. An exploration of Family-based Youth Ministry principles.
6. How to understand people – how to approach people with different temperaments with the aim of faith sharing.

What is Practiced

Students will also conduct a Community needs profile of the local area. This will include door to door questionnaires, the effective use of literature in witnessing, and other opportunities to find and meet the felt needs of the community.

What is Assessed

The course will have both theoretical and practical elements. The assessment will look to the student's ability to apply learning and contextualise it in a current setting.

Learning Methods

Preparatory reading, lectures, group discussion and practicum sessions. Students should expect to involve themselves in a variety of practical exercises that will involve some door to door work in the local community.

Assessment

Class presentations.....	25%
Outline of Personal Faith Story.....	25%
Plan of Action applying personal evangelistic styles and community needs.....	50%

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APPENDIX K

GENERAL EVALUATION FORM

Relay Institute of Youth Evangelism

Hungary, 17-31 August 2008.

COURSES & MODULES	Parti- cipants	Poor 1	Fair 2	Good 3	Excellent 4
<i>Foundations of Adventist Beliefs</i>					
<i>Bible as a Story</i>	23			3.52	
God and Creation	24			3.29	
Sin and Humanity	26			3.67	
From Abraham to Israel & Exodus	23			3.57	
Israel and the Law	24			3.54	
Davidic Kingdom and Prophets	24			3.62	
Fulfilment in Jesus	24			3.83	
Church and Its Mission	24			3.33	
The Final Restoration	26			3.62	
<i>Foundations of Christian Youth Outreach</i>					
Youth and Evangelism/Planning For Mission	25			3.52	
Teachings of the Apostles and the SoP Counsels	25			3.16	
How To Understand People (Questionnaire)	25			3.52	
Student's Faith Story	25			3.60	
6 Styles of Evangelism	25			3.80	
The Use of Literature in Evangelism	24			3.20	
Spiritual Gifts Inventory	25			3.72	
Principles of Saving Youth in 21 st Century	25			3.60	

Churches of Refuge	25			3.28	
Friendship Evangelism	23			3.70	
Family-Based Youth Ministry	23			3.57	
Practical Sessions Week 1 - Adventist Beliefs (21-22 August)					
Practical Bible Lessons				3.74	
Practical Sessions Week 2 - Life Issues (25-29 August)					
Community Survey				3.60	

(Please add below any comments or suggestions)

a) *What was the best thing about Relay?*

b) *What was the weakest thing about Relay?*

c) *Any other suggestions how Relay could serve you better?*

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VITA

Paul David Tompkins

Educational History

- 1989 Master of Arts, Religion (Andrews University)
- 1988 Certificate in Church Growth and Pastoral Ministry (Newbold College)
- 1982 Postgraduate Certificate in Theology (Newbold College)
- 1980 Bachelor of Arts, Theology, cum laude (Newbold College)
- 1975 Higher National Diploma in Business Studies (Hitchin College)

Professional History

- 2000-Present Youth and Family Ministries Director, Trans-European Division
- 1999-2000 Youth and ADRA Director, British Union Conference
- 1995-1999 Youth and Communication Director, British Union Conference and Stanborough School (Marketing)
- 1991-1995 Youth and Communications Director, British Union Conference
- 1985-1991 Associate Youth Director, South England Conference
- 1983-1985 Minister of Swindon and Trowbridge district of churches, South England Conference
- 1982-1983 Ministerial Intern and Youth Minister in Gloucester district of churches, South England Conference
- 1981-1982 Evangelistic Team member, Stanborough Park and Hemel Hempstead, South England Conference

Family

Married in 1983 to Dawn Marie Thirkell
Children—Laura (1985) and Amy (1987)

Hobbies

Caravanning, Photography, and Tennis